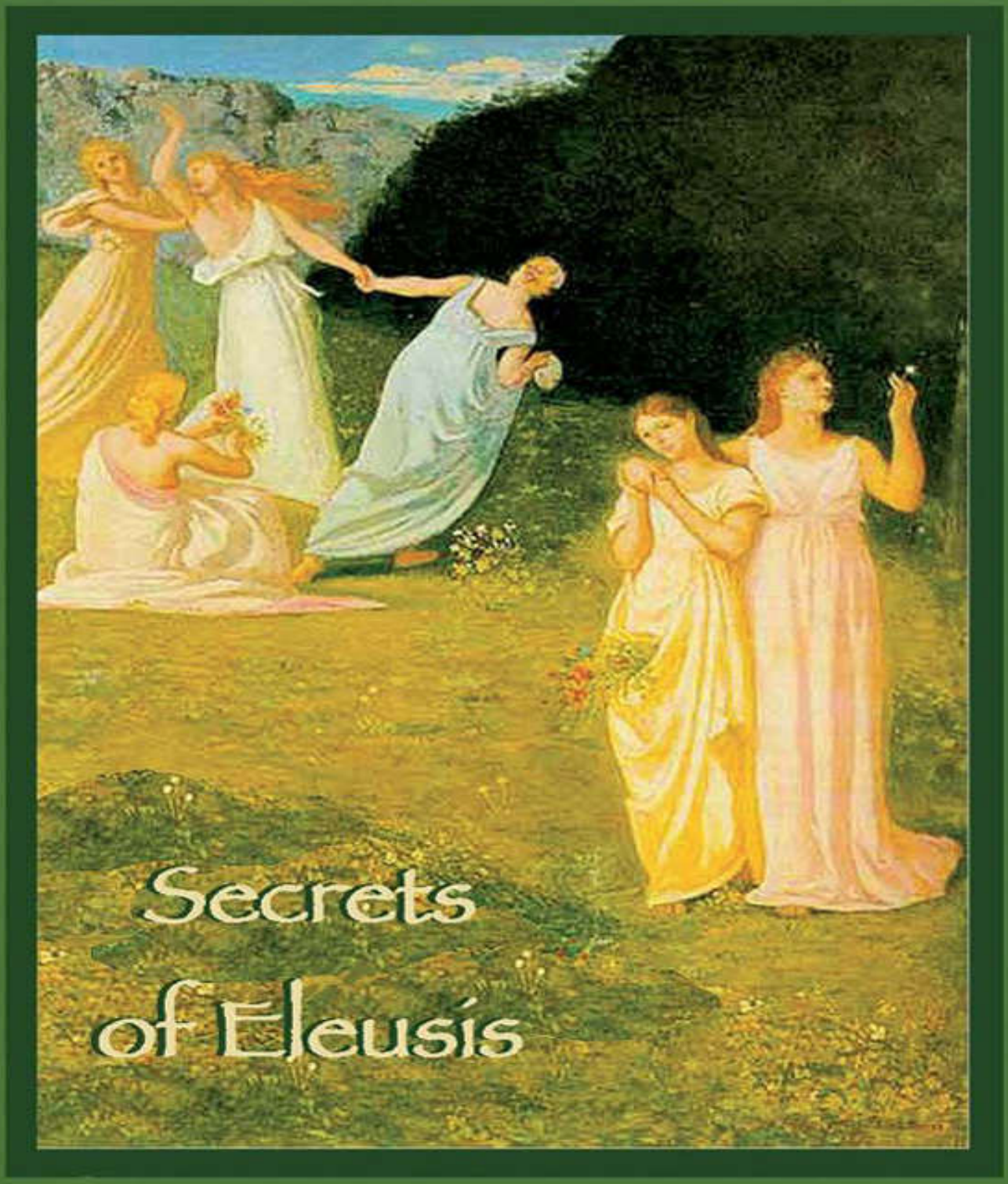
SACRED MUSHROOMS OF THE GODDESS



CARL A. P. RUCK

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In memory of Blaise Daniel Staples, my companion and soul mate.
He is dearly missed.

Only a new Eleusis could help mankind
to survive the threatening catastrophe
in Nature and human society
and bring a new period of happiness.

—Albert Hofmann
personal communication to Carl Ruck

Indeed, I'm thinking now you may really have found *the key* concerning the Eleusinian Mysteries. My full compliments for this.

—Giorgio Samorini
former editor of the *Journal Eleusis*
correspondence to Peter Webster

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Preface

by Huston Smith

WHEN I WAS ABOUT TO PUBLISH *Cleansing the Doors of Perception: The Religious Significance of Entheogenic Plants and Chemicals*, there were those who advised me not to do so, saying that it would destroy my reputation. Time has proved them wrong. As the religious significance of these substances comes to be increasingly accepted—the glaring exception being the Food and Drug Administration—the sales of that book (favorably reviewed from the beginning) continue to rise. As does my conviction of the importance of the issue, and I will say why.

The great achievement of the linguist Noam Chomsky, who was my colleague during the fifteen years I taught at MIT, was to discover the universal grammar that every spoken language—English, Chinese, French, whatever—must conform to, for it seems to be imprinted into the human brain. I, for my part, have worked out the universal grammar of religion to which authentic religions conform. Reduced to a single sentence, that grammar concludes that Reality is Perfect, and that human beings should do their best to conform their lives to that perfection.

Reality's perfection seems to be contradicted by perception of the world, but this is not surprising, for Reality is Infinite and our minds are not. Out minds must expand if they are to receive even glimpses of the Infinite Perfection. Thus the question is: how can they do this?

Perfect Reality has provided a way. Through the entheogens, to be sure, but here we come to a point that has been under-noticed in the discussion of this important subject. A half century ago, the Canadian medical anthropologist, Raymond Prince, pointed out that the brain chemistry caused by exhaustion and typhoid fever is very close to that which the

entheogens produce. And, he added, in early history entheogenic experiences must have been induced far more frequently by those physiological causes than by entheogenic plants which are rare in nature and very hard to come by.

To this I need only add every religion—and indeed every civilization, for civilizations flow like tidal waves from implosions that set them in motion. These implosions are Revelations. The word, Revelation, derives etymologically from *re-velum,* the drawing back of a veil as in the morning we draw back the curtains to let in the light of day. And that is precisely what entheogenic alterations of brain chemistry do—they let in the light of the Infinite, Perfect Reality.

However, despite the importance of Revelation, they are also limited, for like the tidal waves they set in motion, the power of the tidal waves diminishes as they proceed. This is where sacred plants become important. To switch metaphors, they are like telephone poles that restore wires to their original height. Welcome to the book in hand, *Sacred Mushrooms of the Goddess and the Secrets of Eleusis.* It brings a wealth of new information to the vitally important subject.

HUSTON SMITH is a most foremost scholar and interpreter of religion and the author of *The World's Religions* and *The Soul of Christianity.*

1

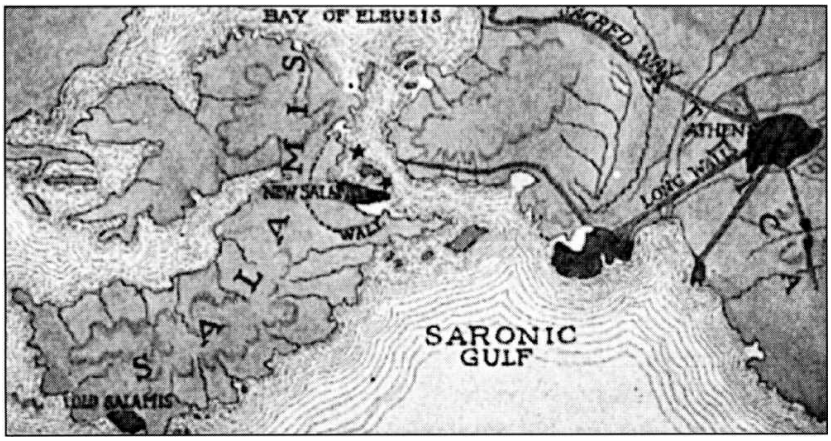
Mysteries and Secret Cults

THERE IS NOTHING SACRED TODAY about the Sacred Road except its name. It leaves what was once the ancient city of Athens amidst ramshackle shops and industrial buildings, passing through dismal suburbs as it slowly rises toward the low ridge on the barren mountain that encloses the western limit of the Attic plain.

On the crest, the ancient traveler would pause to rest in a grove of laurel trees sacred to Apollo. It is they that still give their name to the place, but long ago a Christian monastery was built there out of the ancient stones to obliterate the memory of the pagan traveler, and the surrounding pine forest is now the site for the annual Daphni Wine Festival.

The House of the Goddess

FROM THE RIDGE, the road descended into the fertile Rarian plain; it was here, they said, that grain had first been planted. Today, the plain is the most highly industrialized area in Greece and although the road follows its original path along the shore, the narrow bay of Salamis, where the Athenians once defeated the vastly superior Persian fleet, is now congested with tankers riding at anchor, unloading petroleum to the clusters of storage facilities and refineries. The trip to Eleusis used to be mimetic of a journey to the otherworld to claim back from death the daughter of the grain mother Demeter, whose sorrow for her lost daughter could be assuaged only through the mystery of rebirth.

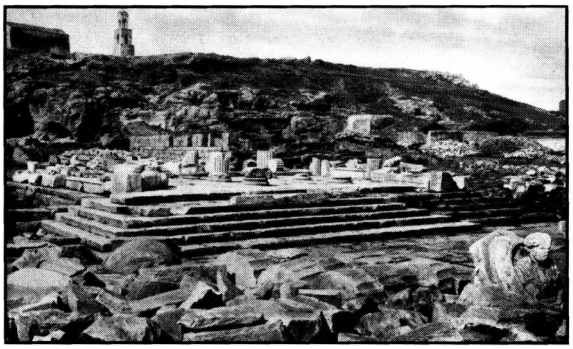


MAP OF THE SACRED ROAD EASTWARD ACROSS MOUNT AIGALIOS, WITH SALAMIS AND THE BAY OF ELEUSIS

A traveler on the modern highway is apt not even to notice the remains of the sanctuary of the love goddess Aphrodite on the right at the base of the descent or the brackish streams that were thought to flow from a subterranean source and that once formed the boundary between the two realms.

In 1938 Dr. Albert Hofmann synthesized a chemical he named LSD, whose visionary properties he did not discover until his historic “Bicycle Ride” of 1943, thereby stumbling upon a 4000-year-old secret.

A man named Krokos, named for his “Saffron” hue, was said to have been the first to dwell on the other side of the lake as husband to the Eleusinian Saisara, the “Grinning Bitch,” a name that was an epithet for the terrible queen amongst the dead, before the Mystery had pacified her and changed her name. Appropriately, only the priesthood had the prerogative of fishing in those waters, for it was they, the inheritors of that office, who regulated the transfer from life to death, a passage which the Eleusinian faith viewed as a metaphysical union between lovers across a division of water.



REMAINS OF THE ELEUSINIAN SANCTUARY

At Eleusis itself, the religion toward which the ancient traveler made his way was shielded from profane observance by the sanctuary's fortification wall, and the essential dogma was imparted only to those who, under pain of death, had vowed to keep it secret and had undergone a lengthy preparation for their initiation.

THE RARIAN PLAIN WITH THE BAY OF SALAMIS

Although the walls have fallen into ruins and the modern tourist can freely intrude upon the prohibited ground, the secret is no longer there. A century of archaeological excavation has succeeded only in clearing the debris from a sanctuary that was destroyed not by time alone, but by the bitter hatred of a rival faith, for the Mystery of Eleusis had competed too well with the newer religion and finally in its fourth century into the

Christian era it had forcibly been brought to an end after almost two millennia, during most of which time it had been the primary spiritual consolation for all of Hellenized mankind.

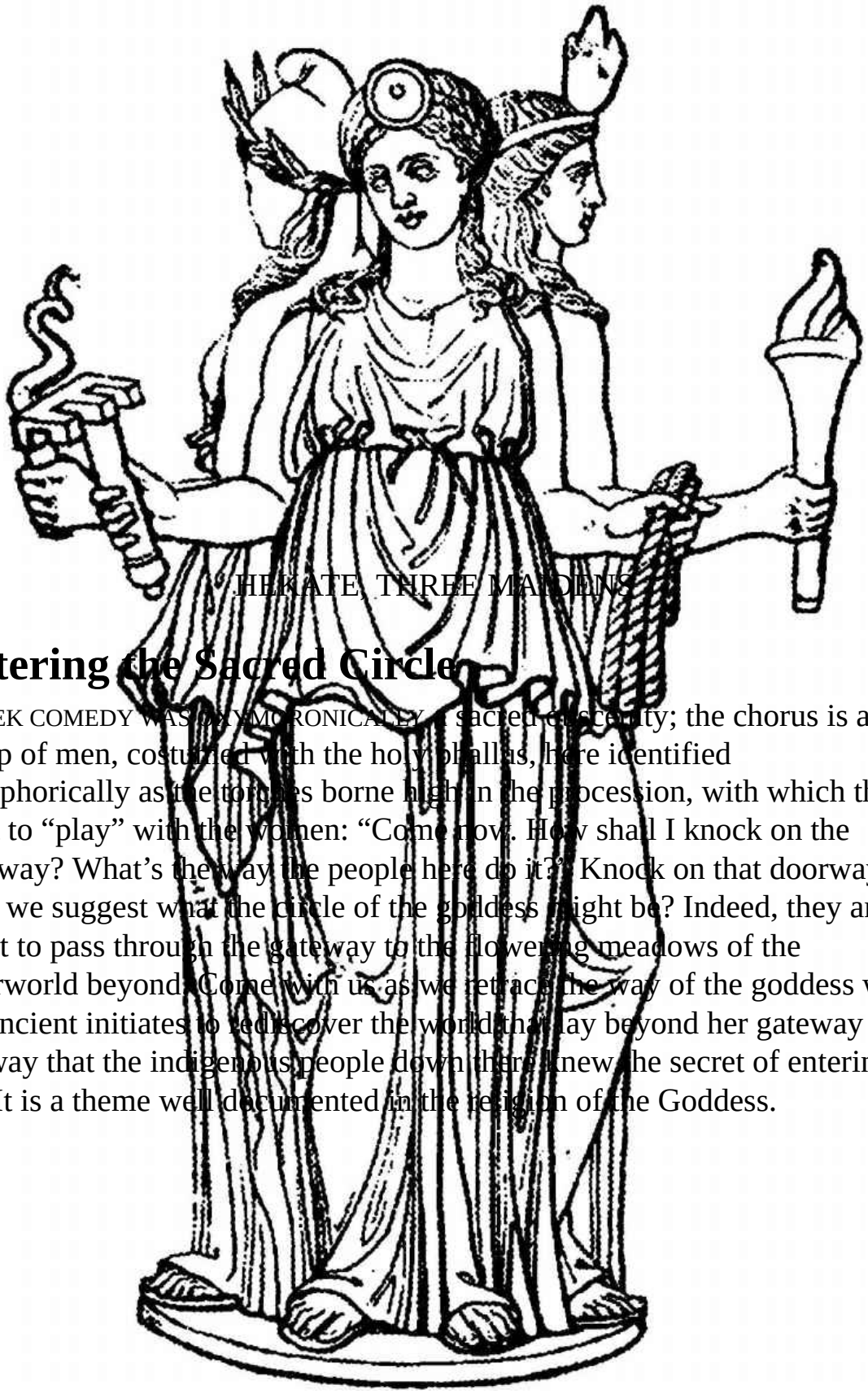
The ancient Greco-Roman world worshipped in established religions supported by the governments, like the officially recognized religious denominations of today. But the official cults, in their great diversity, failed to offer a sense of individual identity and special communion with the deities of the otherworld. In various private or more emotive and ecstatic cults and rituals, the individual was afforded an experience of personal communion with deity, involving secrets of actions and meanings that were hidden and whose divulging outside the community of initiates was prohibited, under the penalty of death. These cults were called Mysteries. The major of the Mysteries was the one practiced for two millennia at the village of Eleusis to the west of Athens, called the Eleusinian Mystery.

> Whoever among men who walk the earth has seen these Mysteries is blessed, but whoever is uninitiated and has not received his share of the rite, he will not have the same lot as the others, once he is dead and dwells in the mould where the sun goes down.
>
> HOMERIC HYMN TO DEMETER VERSES 480 SQ.

At Eleusis, the deities were a duo of females, Demeter and Persephone, interchangeable in their roles as mother and daughter, hence known simply as the religion of the two goddesses, with a third female lurking in the background, the post-menopausal crone, Hekate, patroness of drugs and witchcraft, who united them as a triad triumphant over the dominant males who feared their power and attempted to separate their intuitive and physiological communion by sequestering them as wives isolated within a husband’s household. The initiation into their cult restored them to primacy, at least in the religious realm, and taught both males and females how to live in tune with the incomprehensible phenomenon of the continuity of life and

death, and the awesome powers of the once dominant Goddess and the forces of nature.

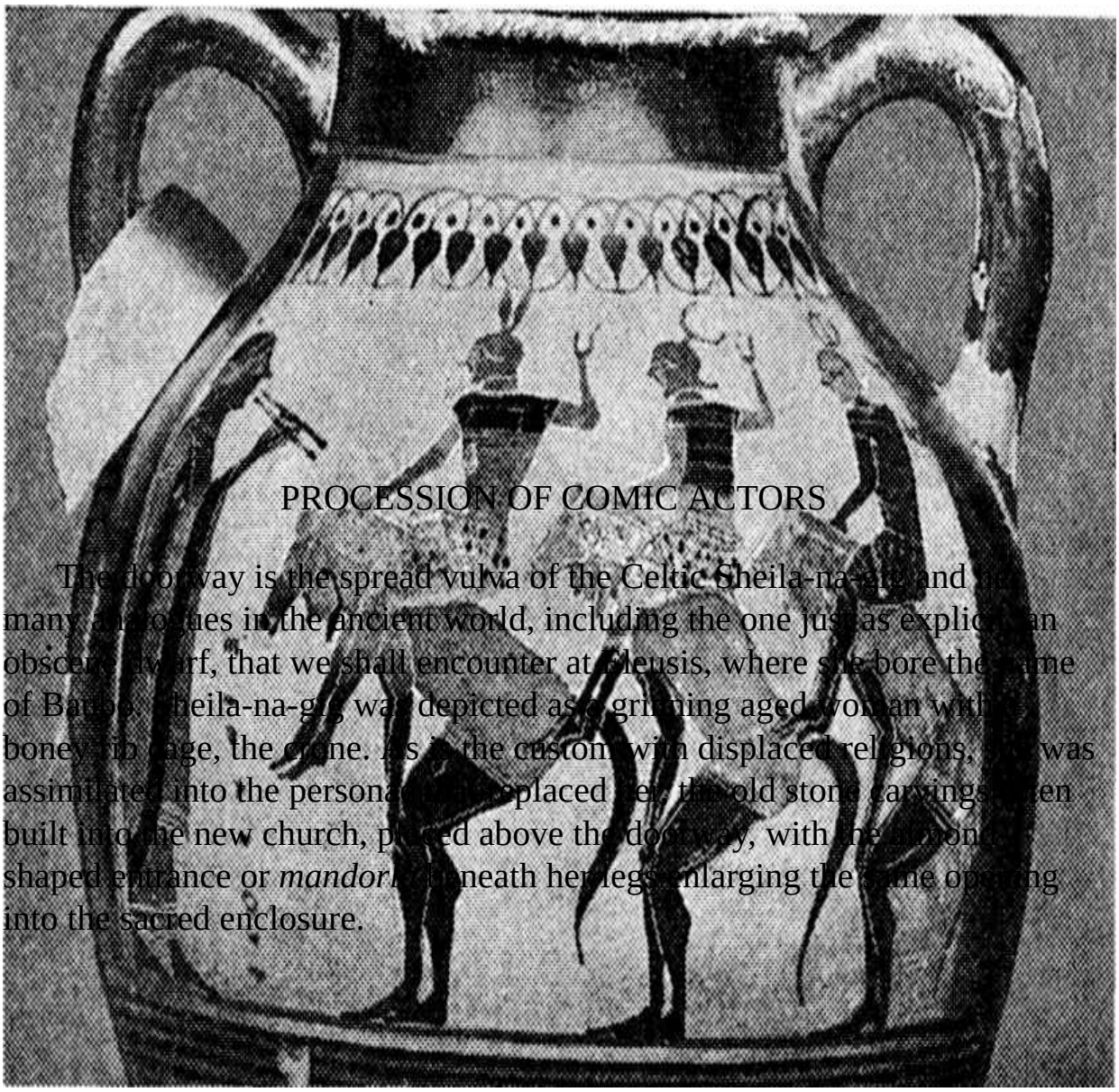
The desecrated sanctuary has lost its numinous aura today, all its gods long since dead or chased away. But in Athens, some twenty feet lower than the modern city, we can still stand on a portion of the Sacred Road where it first left the city gate, passing through the monuments of the ancient cemetery. From this excavation, the intervening city disappears and we can look up across the centuries directly to the Acropolis. In the swampy ground that lies along the road, reeds grow and flower profusely and amidst the croaking of frogs, we can almost expect still to hear the exultant cries of the initiates as they set out for Eleusis, calling upon Iakchos, as in the Eleusinian chorus of Aristophanes' *Frogs.* It was this Iakchos who would lead them to the Mystery. Iakchos is the personification of their ecstatic cry. His real identity was part of the secret, probably an epithet of Dionysus, since he was specifically named a child of Semele.



HEKATE, THREE MAIDENS

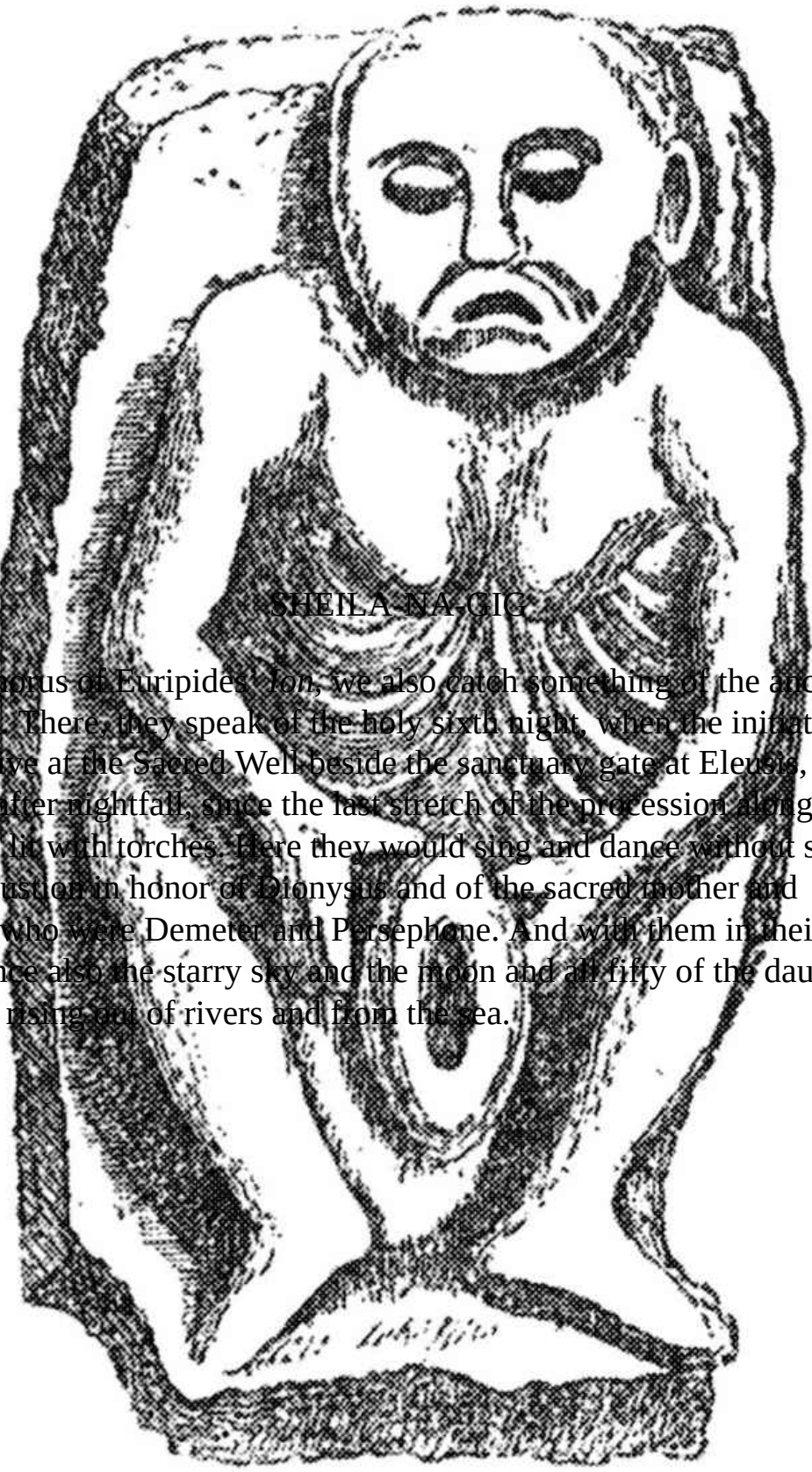
Entering the Sacred Circle

GREEK COMEDY WAS OFTEN ERONICALLY a sacred obscenity; the chorus is a group of men, costumed with the holy phallus, here identified metaphorically as the torches borne high in the procession, with which they want to “play” with the women: “Come now. How shall I knock on the doorway? What’s the way the people here do it?” Knock on that doorway: need we suggest what the circle of the goddess might be? Indeed, they are about to pass through the gateway to the flowering meadows of the otherworld beyond. Come with us as we retrace the way of the goddess with the ancient initiates to rediscover the world that lay beyond her gateway and the way that the indigenous people down there knew the secret of entering her. It is a theme well documented in the religion of the Goddess.



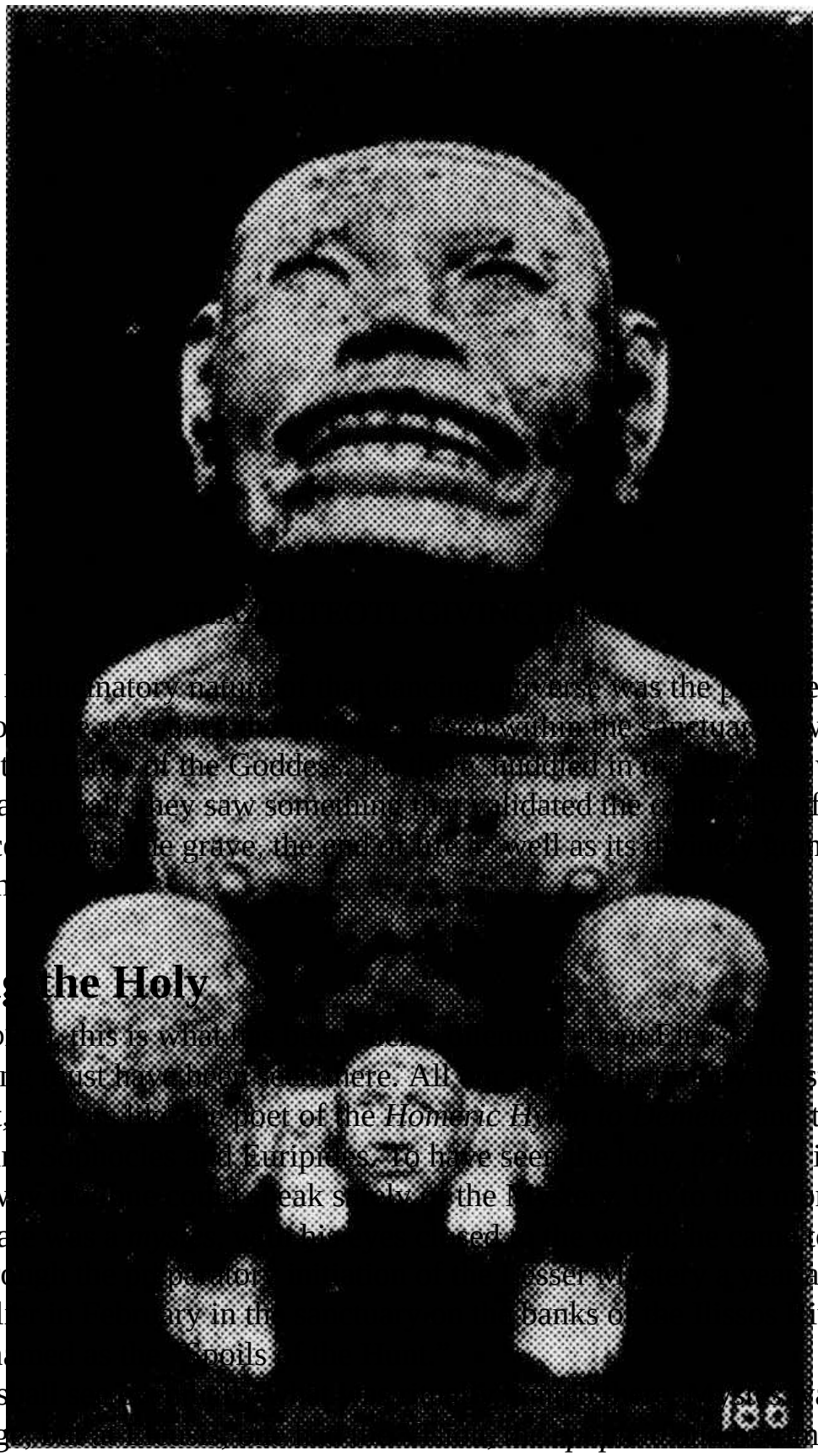
PROCESSION OF COMIC ACTORS

The doorway is the spread vulva of the Celtic Sheila-na-gig and its many analogues in the ancient world, including the one just as explicit an obscene dwarf, that we shall encounter at Eleusis, where she bore the name of Baubo. Sheila-na-gig was depicted as a grinning aged woman with a boney rib cage, the crone. As is the custom with displaced religions, she was assimilated into the personages who replaced her; the old stone carvings were built into the new church, placed above the doorway, with the arrondissement-shaped entrance or *mandorla* beneath her legs enlarging the same opening into the sacred enclosure.



SHEILA-NA-GIG

In a chorus of Euripides' *Ion*, we also catch something of the ancient exultation. There, they speak of the holy sixth night, when the initiates at last would arrive at the Sacred Well beside the sanctuary gate at Eleusis, probably after nightfall, since the last stretch of the procession along the shore was lit with torches. Here they would sing and dance without sleep until exhaustion in honor of Dionysus and of the sacred mother and daughter, who were Demeter and Persephone. And with them in their dance would dance also the starry sky and the moon and all fifty of the daughters of Ocean, rising out of rivers and from the sea.



The [illegible] to what wo[illegible] wall and entered t[illegible] within the initia[illegible] f existenc[illegible] nted beginnin[illegible]

Seeing the Holy

AND IND[illegible] this is what [illegible] somethi[illegible] sts upon that fact, [illegible] the tragedian[illegible] it was in that w[illegible] oment, the initia[illegible] o that state thro[illegible] and a half earl[illegible] iver at Agrai, n[illegible]

We s[illegible] as the first stag[illegible] e

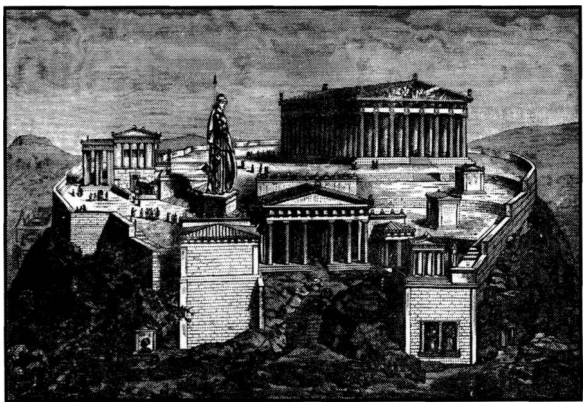
someone who had seen, an *epoptes*. In Greek, knowledge and seeing are inseparable, the former resulting from experiencing the later. Even a "theory" in Greek implies a sacred journey to witness something Holy.

> By the well called Beautiful Dancing, he will see the light burst forth, awake all night, as the stars begin to dance and with them dance the moon.
>
> EURIPIDES ION VERSES, 1074 SQ.

Yet archaeologists have not found the Holy, *ta hiera*, at Eleusis, although they did actually expect that they would. And in the absence of any excavated object, scholars have been free to fantasize whatever they wanted these mysterious *hiera* to be: relics, according to some, from the Mycenaean past or phallic symbols or perhaps the *kteis*, the so-called "comb," a terra-cotta replica of the *pudenda muliebria*, the vulva. These holy things were supposedly stored in a small building or free standing chamber within the initiation hall; at the moment of the revelation, the Hierophant opened a door on that ancient House of the Goddess and in the midst of a great light, he showed *ta hiera*.

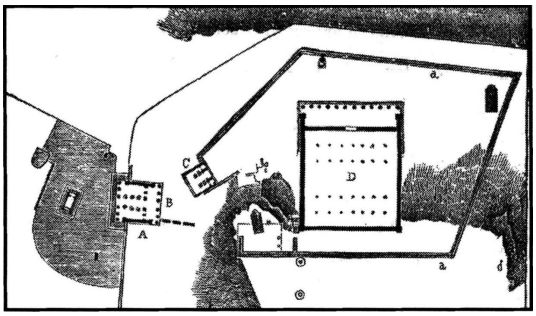
> How many nights have I spent standing on the steps of the Telesterion, flooded with the magic silver light of a Mediterranean moon, hoping to catch the mood of the initiates, hoping that the human soul might get a glimpse of what the rational mind could not investigate! All in vain—the ancient world has kept its secret well, and the mysteries of Eleusis remain unrevealed.
>
> GEORGE MYLONAS EXCAVATOR OF ELEUSIS

The ancient testimony about Eleusis is unanimous. Eleusis was the supreme experience in an initiate's life. It was both physical and mystical: trembling, vertigo, cold sweat, and then a sight that made all previous seeing seem like blindness, a sense of awe and wonder at a brilliance that caused a profound silence since what had just been seen and felt could never be communicated: words are unequal to the task. Those symptoms are unmistakably the experience induced by an entheogen, to use the now widely accepted neologism to avoid the pejorative implication of words like drug or hallucinogen.



THE ACROPOLIS OF ANCIENT ATHENS

Simply put, the *heira* or Holy cannot be found in this world. The testimony is clear that what was seen wasn't something of this world, but something there in the otherworld. One had to journey beneath the earth to witness the Holy. The hierophant was one "who made the Holy appear," but when he opened the door on the chamber, it broke the seal between the worlds and opened a rift in the cosmic fabric. But few initiates, however, could have actually seen him physically or materially in the *Telesterion* or initiation hall, named in Greek as the teleological "culmination," the *telos* or "end," rather than the Latin *initium* or initial "beginning." It didn't matter, because the vision didn't materialize there at the door opened on the Goddess's House, with its supposed physical obscenities stored within. The *Telesterion* was not a theater and was in other ways completely unsuitable for witnessing the Hierophant's activity.



PLAN OF THE ELEUSINIAN TELESTERION

The building was actually cut out of the acropolis rock at Eleusis, essentially an architectural simulacrum of a subterranean chamber or a cave. It was rebuilt and enlarged at various times to accommodate the increasing numbers of initiates, but in all its modifications, an essential design was maintained: the *Telesterion* was a rectilinear building built around a much smaller rectangular chamber, the *Anaktoron* or "Dwelling of the Mistress." In the later *Telesterion,* at least, the roof above this *Anaktoron* was constructed as a "lantern," admitting the only light from outside and affording ventilation for torches and oil lamps.

> The Holy was not something of this world, but something seen from the otherworld. Physical objects were not what the Hierophant released from the antique dwelling, as the stars and moon began to dance.

The topographical position of the *Anaktoron* was kept virtually constant throughout the reconstructions, built always on the site of the most ancient Mycenaean original, what the archaeologists label the Mycenaean *megaron* or Great Chamber. Its relative placement within the *Telesterion,* however, varied from period to period. The actual *Telesterion* was merely an enshrining of this most ancient Holy of Holies. This was the original House of the Goddess.

VOTIVE PLAQUE OF EUKRATES

On one of its sides, the *Anaktoron* had a door, beside which was the high-backed, stone-carved throne of the Hierophant. The interior chamber of the *Telesterion* consisted of several steps leading up to the wall. Here the initiates presumably would sit or stand, with others perhaps also on the main floor of the hall. The line of view toward the physical door on the Mistress's House obviously would have been obstructed from most angles. With the forest of columns that supported the roof, and the high back on the Hierophant's throne at a right angle to the door, the sacred antique dwelling itself all blocking the view, many candidates within the hall would have found it impossible to see what the Hierophant did at the moment of the "vision."

The *hiera*, moreover, seem to have been remarkably transportable, for although they ordinarily resided within this ancient chamber and supposedly were let out of the sanctuary for processions only hidden in closed hampers, Alcibiades and other prominent Athenians were able to "show" them profanely to groups of friends at their private drinking parties. Although this profanation was a great scandal, no one ever thought of accusing the priesthood of complicity in allowing the *hiera* out of the sanctuary. Actually, Greek scholars should have had no difficulty in recognizing that the *hiera*

need not have referred to specific objects, but to the whole realm of the holy, Holiness, the experience and the ceremony of religion.

> A mystes is someone who closes the eyes as for slumber. Others derive it from the idea of closing the lips or binding to silence. Sophocles' Oedipus has lost his mortal eyesight to gain deeper insight as the preliminary to the final termination of his life at Colonos, with its strong Eleusinian connotations.
>
> VERSES 1165-6.

When the hierophant opened the Door of the Goddess, there was a brilliant flash of light. Those who insist on ignoring the evidence assume that there must have been some huge bonfire inside the Dwelling of the Mistress. How could such a fire have been lit without a chimney? Why would the choking fumes not have quickly rendered the air unbreathable, with disastrous effect upon the huddled masses, needless to speak of the concentrated heat in the enclosed space, not to mention a conflagration that might have decimated the congregants? The brilliance was the common metaphor for the Illumination, when the sacred door between the realms was ceremonial breeched.

Seeing the Goddess

HERACLES WAS SAID to have been more precise about what was seen. It was Persephone herself. In a papyrus fragment, he claims that he had no need of the initiation because he had already seen her when he descended into Hades. According to Euripides, it was this vision that allowed him to triumph over death. He was able to join with the other *mystae* for his resurfacing to the land of the living, as one who had seen, an *epoptes.*

Here too, we must remember that the initiation hall was not a theater. No money is recorded in the account books for expenditures on theatrical equipment or actors at Eleusis. Nor is it likely that the Greeks, who were so

sophisticated about drama, would have fallen for a dumb show, some trick of stagecraft. It was not an actor but Persephone, herself, who was seen, a *schema ti,* a form or appearance of some kind hovering above the ground, as one source claimed. Plato more explicitly called them *phasmata* or ghostly apparitions. The initiation hall became filled with spirits, as Pausanias records in telling us about someone who intruded upon the ceremony and subsequently died.

It was something that even a blind man could see. A painted marble votive plaque of the 5th century BCE found in the excavation of the *Telesterion* was dedicated to Demeter by a certain Eukrates, a blind man who without eyes saw the Goddess. Over the inscription are the blind eyes of Eukrates, above which rises the carved face and head of the goddess rising surrounded by red rays.

It was no doubt the common expectation of such events at Eleusis that was responsible for the many witnesses who claimed to have seen a cloud of dust rising above the Sacred Road and to have heard the Iakchos cries when the spirits alone performed the Mystery because all the Athenians had fled before the invading Persian army.

2

The Obscene Dance of the Dwarf

CLEARLY A HALLUCINATORY REALITY was induced within the initiation hall and since at times as many as several thousand initiates with their attendants, a number greater than the population of an ordinary ancient town, were afforded such a vision annually on schedule, it would seem obvious that some psychoactive substance, an entheogenic Eucharist was involved. As the Christian Clement, Bishop of Alexandria, contemptuously reveals to us, the *hiera* in the mystic hampers were actually only foods of various kinds.

> The original idea that the mushroom cult came into Europe with the northern migration of the Indo-Europeans must be modified. There was also an obvious southern transfer along the trade routes from Persia. And the immigrants found the cult already established among the indigenous cultures, apparently originating from Africa. The same thing happened with the Conquistadores who found the same heretical sacraments of the European elite in the New World, but scandalously revealing pagan deities.

Thus Alcibiades and the others who were convicted of the profanations of the year 415 BCE would, of course, have had no difficulty in acquiring *ta hiera* for their secular recreational celebrations, for these profanations, it was discovered, had occurred repeatedly in social contexts, with groups of

inebriated friends at dinner gatherings in some of the city's most aristocratic houses. And indeed, we do know that the drinking of a special potion, the *kykeon,* was an essential part of the Mystery.

The ingredients for this drink are recorded in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*: barley (*alphi*), water, and mint or *glechon / blechon.* The linguist Calvin Watkins has shown that the procedures and ingredients for the preparation of such magical or ritual potions in Greek show exact formulaic correspondences with the Vedic Soma ritual and he concludes that these correspondences cannot be coincidental but must instead indicate that the Greek pattern reflects the ritual drink of the Indo-Iranian religion.

That drink is hallucinogenic, a *mixed* potion that is always prepared by a woman or marked as female by the inclusion of milk and always placed in a special vessel to be drunk by participants who are seated. In terms of these correspondences in formulae, it is interesting to note that priestesses performed the ceremony of mixing the sacred potion and that the initiation hall at Eleusis provides seating space for the initiates on the tiers of steps that line the interior walls.

Lambe-Baubo

THIS ELEUSINIAN MIXED *KYKEON* DRINK was first prepared for Demeter by the bizarre servant of the Queen in the old House of the Goddess, preserved as the enshrined *Anaktoron* within the *Telesterion.* Exhausted from searching for her abducted daughter Persephone, Demeter arrived at the Well of Beautiful Dancing, as it was called, just outside the gate to what would become the Eleusinian sanctuary; it was here that the initiates in later times would dance until exhaustion after their long walk from Athens on the Sacred Way before passing through the portals into the forbidden Inner Sanctum.

> Nor did she say or do a thing; she just sat mirthless, with a taste for neither food nor drink, wasting away because of her desire for her daughter. Thus she remained until the scheming lambe amused her

with jokes and made the holy lady smile, then laugh, softening her heart—Iambe who in later times pleased her at her rites of Mystery.

HOMERIC HYMN TO DEMETER VERSES 195 SQ.

She had disguised herself as an old wet-nurse, giving a false name for herself as Doso, “I shall give,” and claiming falsely that she, too, had been abducted, in her case by pirates on her voyage from Crete, the most probable provenance of the Mystery. The well was also called the Maiden’s Well and the Well of Flowers. As she rests beside this shaft, a narrow tunnel plunging down to the reflective mirror of the subterranean waters, beyond which her daughter now resided in the otherworld on the other side of the aquifer, the mother’s face reflected would be deceptively like herself, but actually its opposite, for such is the magic of mirrors: mother, daughter, interchangeable. Accordingly, she again mimics the experience of her abducted daughter. Persephone was taken from the midst of a sisterhood of water nymphs, the Daughters of Ocean. Thus a sisterhood of four maidens from the Eleusinian House of the Queen Metaneira greets Demeter. They have come to the Well to draw its waters.

She sat broken-hearted near the road at the Virgin’s Well, where the women of the town drew water and where a dense olive tree grew giving shade. Sitting there, she looked like a woman long since a crone, who can bear no children nor enjoy the gifts of Aphrodite; such women are nurses for the children of kings, who administer justice, and they work as housekeepers throughout their endless rooms.

HOMERIC HYMN TO DEMETER VERSES 101 SQ.

They invite her to the House, offering her the job of wet nurse for the last-born son of their mother, Metaneira. The mother Demeter who has lost

her daughter Persephone is now appropriate for the role of wet nurse, the still lactating mother with a child beyond her nurture amongst the dead. She can feed the living with the milk intended for the lost daughter.

The House is apparently too small for someone as gigantic as a goddess, for Demeter hits her head on the roof, before she learns to shrink down to the diminutive size of the Eleusinian household.

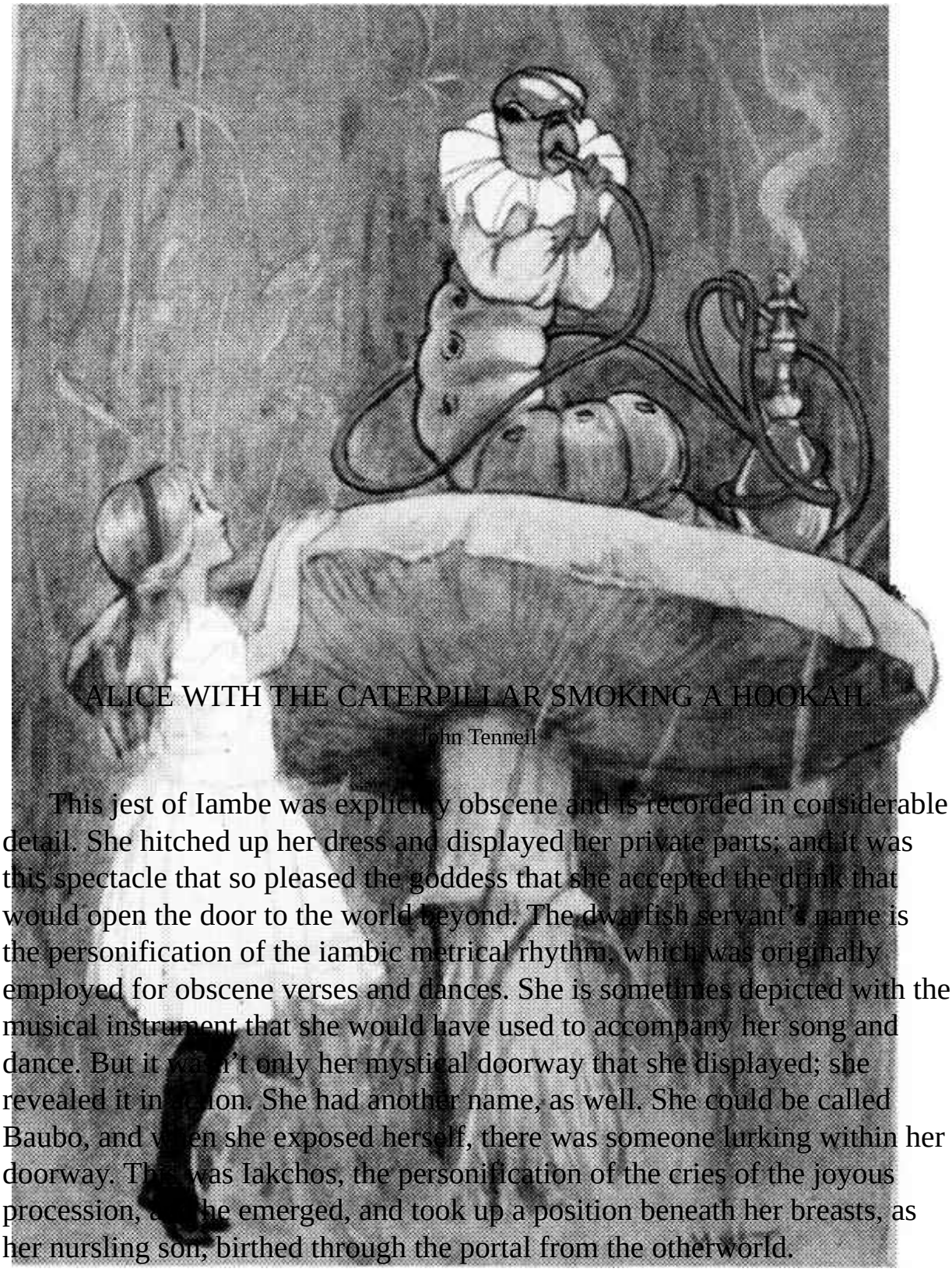
This is the common theme of the alternating dimensions of the creatures of the otherworld, at once surpassingly tall and then no bigger than a dwarf, the shift in size, as in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland,* resulting from the oscillating macroscopic and microscopic vision induced by certain psychoactive substances, in particular the *Amanita muscaria* mushroom, commonly called the fly-agaric, as the author well knew, either from actual experience or reading, indicating the mushroom's botanical identity in the original drawing he made himself, depicting its psychoactive nature by the caterpillar sitting atop it smoking a pipe, which Tenneil, in the more familiar illustrations, more explicitly replaced with a hookah of hashish.

> Alice at the point of passing through the diminutive door that would lead her to her experience of rapt ecstasy in Wonderland, is confronted with a table on which there was a bottle with the words "drink me"; she drank and suddenly "she was only ten inches high, and her face brightened up as it occurred to her that she was now the right size for going through the little door into that lovely garden.
>
> LEWIS CARROLL ALICE'S ADVENTURES UNDER GROUND

The Alice for whom the tale was written was the daughter of the renowned Classicist and ancient Greek lexicographer Liddell, and the adventure was apparently meant to please the father as well, with an obvious re-doing of the Eleusinian journey.

The goddess refused to sit in the glittering chair relinquished by her hostess. Instead the devious servant woman Iambe offered her a stool covered with a ram's fleece, where she sat mirthless, until the same

scheming creature amused her with jokes and made the holy Lady laugh, doing something that would become an element in the later Mysteries.



ALICE WITH THE CATERPILLAR SMOKING A HOOKAH.

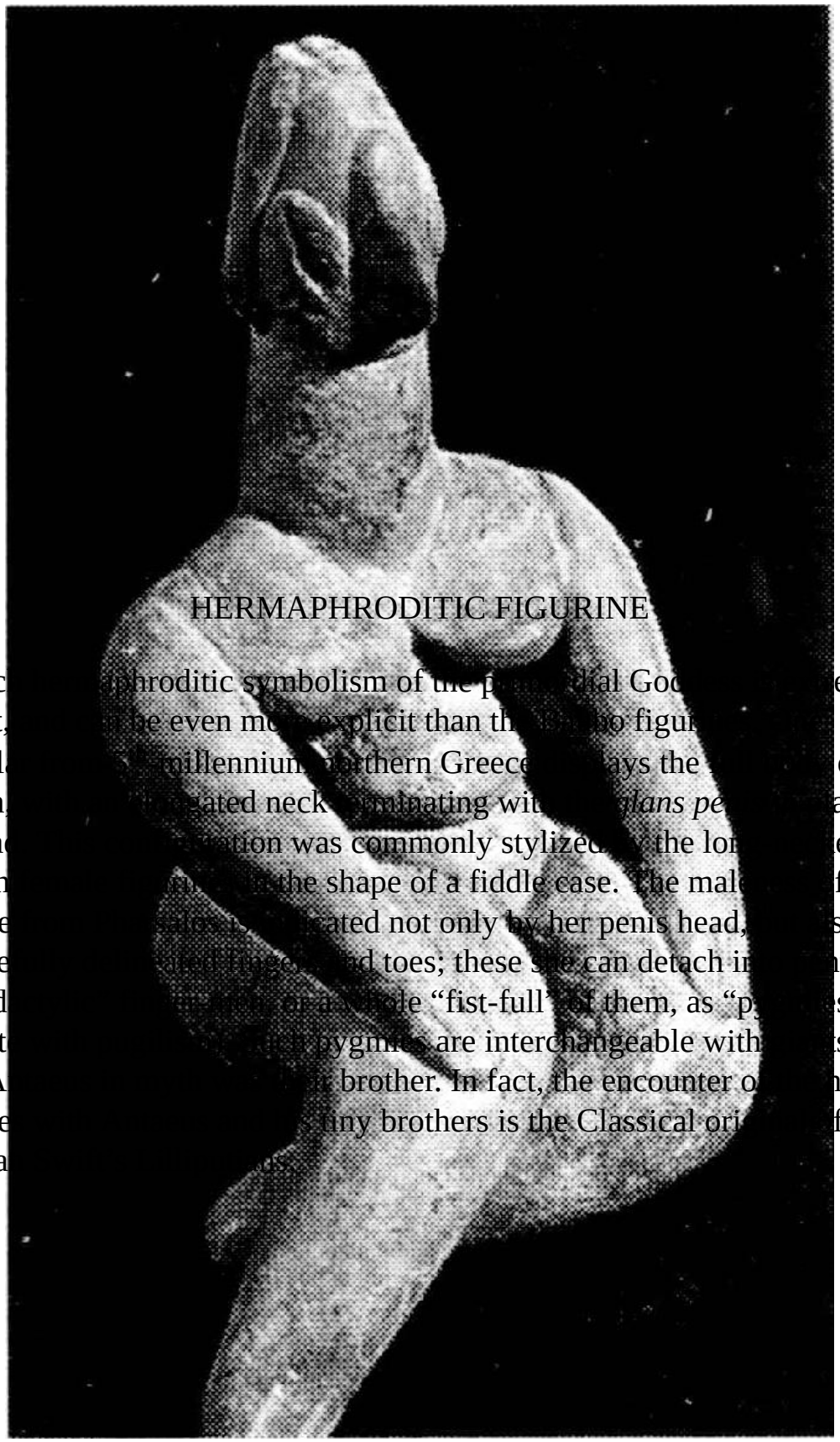
John Tenneil

This jest of Iambe was explicitly obscene and is recorded in considerable detail. She hitched up her dress and displayed her private parts; and it was this spectacle that so pleased the goddess that she accepted the drink that would open the door to the world beyond. The dwarfish servant's name is the personification of the iambic metrical rhythm, which was originally employed for obscene verses and dances. She is sometimes depicted with the musical instrument that she would have used to accompany her song and dance. But it wasn't only her mystical doorway that she displayed; she revealed it in action. She had another name, as well. She could be called Baubo, and when she exposed herself, there was someone lurking within her doorway. This was Iakchos, the personification of the cries of the joyous procession, and he emerged, and took up a position beneath her breasts, as her nursling son, birthed through the portal from the otherworld.

Baubo

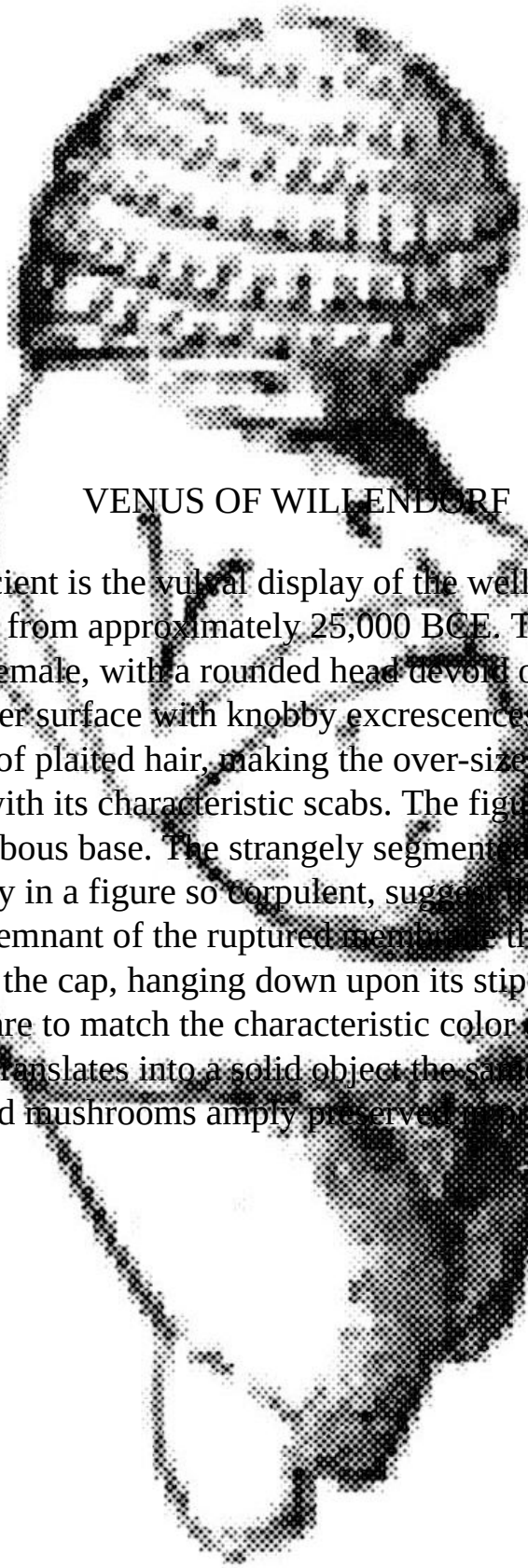
BAUBO IS THE GREEK WORD FOR "ENTRAILS," and the goddess was sometimes depicted with a spiral design as a kind of initiatory labyrinth marking her belly-womb; similar figurines from the Mycenaean period pair the full-circled belly with crescent half-circle bellies, suggesting the phases of the waning and waxing moon and the periodicity of the menstrual cycle, as well as the three traditional phases of the goddess as maiden, mother, and crone. Baubo herself can be seen in 5th-century figurines from Asia Minor as a dwarf with her face on her swollen pregnant belly.

The entrails word may be related to *baubon,* which is the Greek word for the "dildo," an artificial penis for female self-gratification, making the dwarfish woman self-sufficiently hermaphroditic, which is also suggested by the figurines, with her body, face in belly, displaying her vulva, and her two legs fused into a single leg, and the whole monstrosity resembling a one-legged woman as a phallus, with her topknot of hair representing the *glans penis.* She was indeed a bizarre sight to cheer the goddess's grief. The same hermaphroditism is indicated by her revelation of the male child emerging from her vulva. Since Iakchos is the brother of Persephone, Baubo must be a version of Demeter.



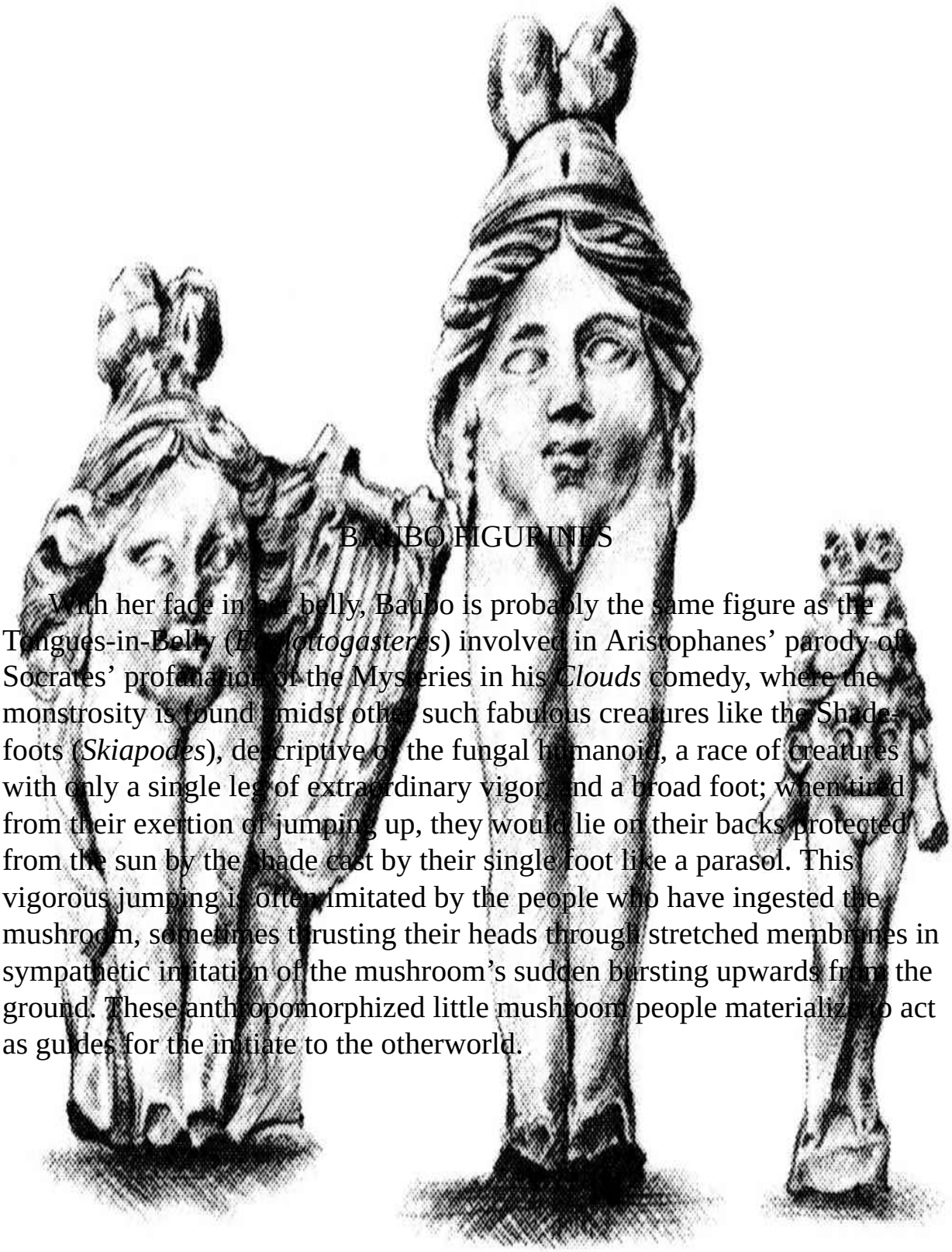
HERMAPHRODITIC FIGURINE

Such phroditic symbolism of the p dial God emely ancient, e even mo explicit than th o figur exampl millennium northern Greece ays the of a woman, gated neck minating wit *glans pe* ace of her hea ation was commonly stylized the lon ed Minoan the shape of a fiddle case. The male f the figurine ator is cated not only by her penis head, so by the care d fingers and toes; these she can detach in ntads of little "d or a whole "fist-full" of them, as "p es" (cognat pygmies are interchangeable with ts, since A brother. In fact, the encounter o hero Herakle tiny brothers is the Classical ori f Jonatha



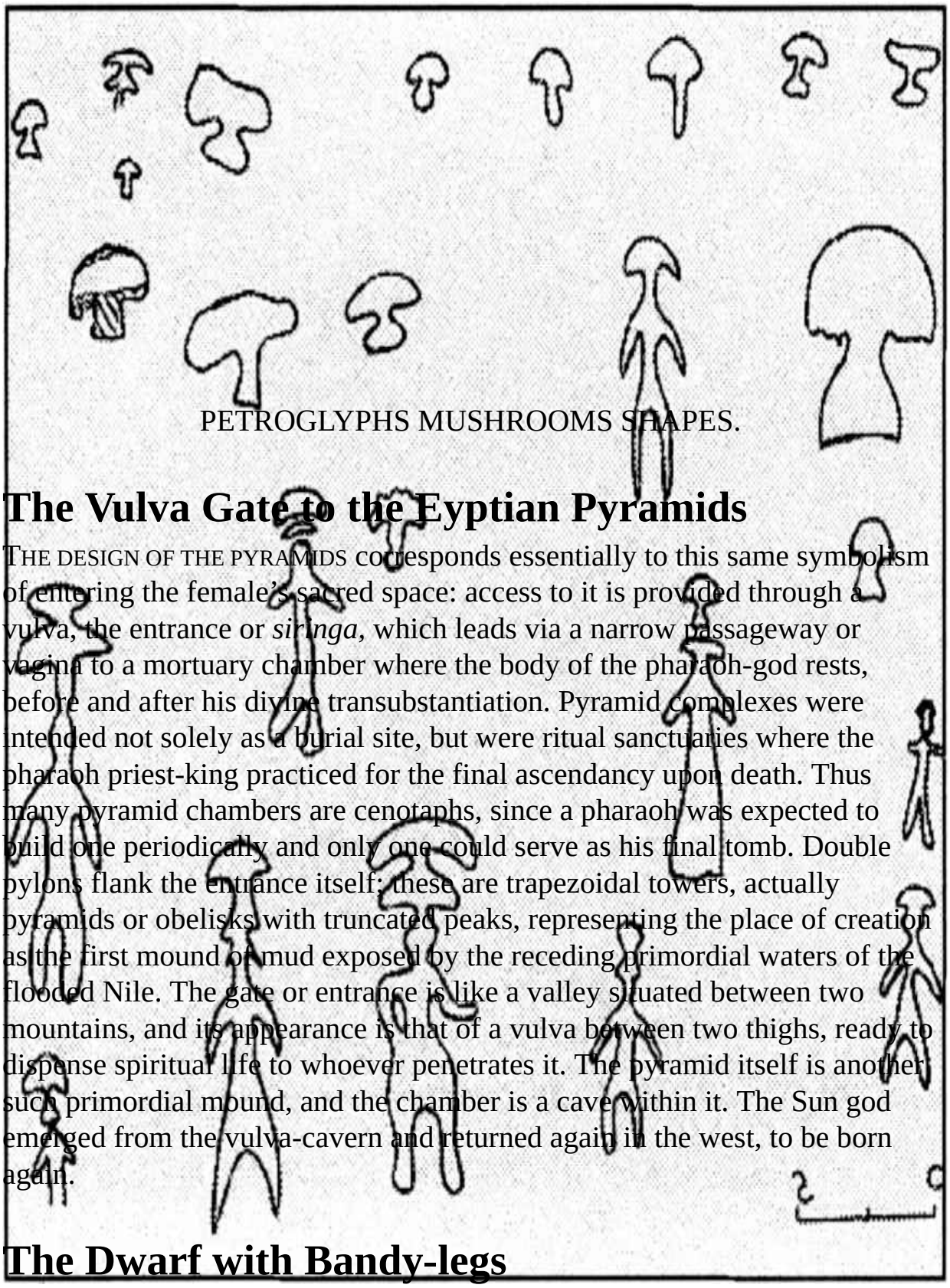
VENUS OF WILLENDORF

Even more ancient is the vulval display of the well-known Venus of Willendorf, dating from approximately 25,000 BCE. The figurine depicts a grossly pregnant female, with a rounded head devoid of facial features, but covered on its upper surface with knobby excrescences, seven mystical concentric circles of plaited hair, making the over-size head into the mushroom's cap with its characteristic scabs. The figurine's steatopygia personifies the bulbous base. The strangely segmented and handless slender arms, extraordinary in a figure so corpulent, suggest the mushroom's dentate annulus ring, the remnant of the ruptured membrane that covered the gills on the bottom side of the cap, hanging down upon its stipe. The figurine is tinted with red ochre to match the characteristic color of the fly-agaric. Such a figurine merely translates into a solid object the same theme of anthropomorphized mushrooms amply preserved in the historic petroglyphs.



BAUBO FIGURINES

With her face in her belly, Baubo is probably the same figure as the Tongues-in-Belly (*Endottogasteres*) involved in Aristophanes' parody of Socrates' profanation of the Mysteries in his *Clouds* comedy, where the monstrosity is found amidst other such fabulous creatures like the Shade-foots (*Skiapodes*), descriptive of the fungal humanoid, a race of creatures with only a single leg of extraordinary vigor and a broad foot; when tired from their exertion of jumping up, they would lie on their backs protected from the sun by the shade cast by their single foot like a parasol. This vigorous jumping is often imitated by the people who have ingested the mushroom, sometimes thrusting their heads through stretched membranes in sympathetic imitation of the mushroom's sudden bursting upwards from the ground. These anthropomorphized little mushroom people materialize to act as guides for the initiate to the otherworld.



PETROGLYPHS MUSHROOMS SHAPES.

The Vulva Gate to the Eyptian Pyramids

THE DESIGN OF THE PYRAMIDS corresponds essentially to this same symbolism of entering the female's sacred space: access to it is provided through a vulva, the entrance or *siringa,* which leads via a narrow passageway or vagina to a mortuary chamber where the body of the pharaoh-god rests, before and after his divine transubstantiation. Pyramid complexes were intended not solely as a burial site, but were ritual sanctuaries where the pharaoh priest-king practiced for the final ascendancy upon death. Thus many pyramid chambers are cenotaphs, since a pharaoh was expected to build one periodically and only one could serve as his final tomb. Double pylons flank the entrance itself; these are trapezoidal towers, actually pyramids or obelisks with truncated peaks, representing the place of creation as the first mound of mud exposed by the receding primordial waters of the flooded Nile. The gate or entrance is like a valley situated between two mountains, and its appearance is that of a vulva between two thighs, ready to dispense spiritual life to whoever penetrates it. The pyramid itself is another such primordial mound, and the chamber is a cave within it. The Sun god emerged from the vulva-cavern and returned again in the west, to be born again.

The Dwarf with Bandy-legs

THE BIZARRE GOD BES is the Egyptian counterpart of the Greek Iakchos. He traditionally is portrayed as a corpulent apish dwarf, with arms akimbo, legs bowed and spread apart, with a big broad leonine head, protruding tongue, abundant mane and extended ears, and with a penis of extraordinary length that usually reaches to the ground. Unlike other Egyptian deities, he is always shown full frontal, instead of in profile, and he is generally thought to be a Nubian importation. Like Dionysus, he was a deity of intoxication and his function was to aid in parturition, playing the role of a fool to cheer the child and frighten away demons.

The jesting of Bes, however, aided more than the birthing of a human child. Like Iakchos, he is the guide through the vulva. In the transcendence of the pharaoh, the Bes is the boatman who ferries the deceased across the primordial waters, docking at the celestial pier of Nut which is located between her two thighs, beyond which is the Marsh of Reeds, the rich amniotic fluids of Paradise. There the deceased becomes a dwarf himself and dances, there in the gateway, the same obscene dance of empowerment before Osiris, to gladden the heart of the god, as he becomes consubstantial with the deity. Nut is traditionally depicted, as the arch of the heavens, supported by the penis of her brother and mate Geb, like a pillar from the earth docked in her vulva. Or else, their constant copulation is seen interrupted by their father Shu as the intervening air lifting Nut apart from her constant lover, actually "heaving" her upwards to form "heaven." Without the separation, there would be no space for humans to exist; thus the myth is another version of the creation of humans. The configuration of the heavenly sky arched over the pillar has long intrigued mushroom enthusiasts by its inherently fungal design.

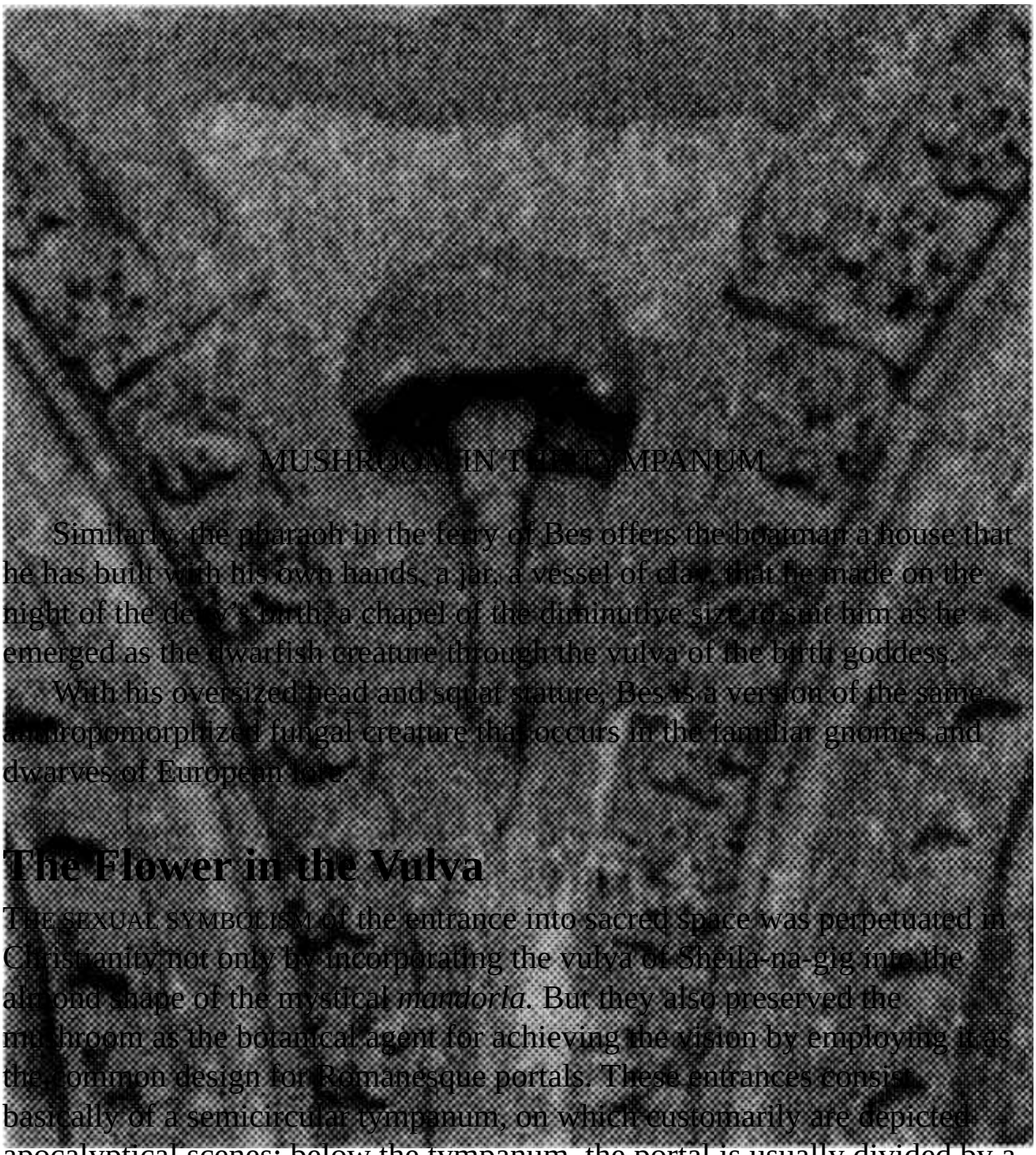
Bes: "May a chapel a cubit high be made for me!"
The Deceased: "Art thou not a giant of seven cubits? I told thee,
'Thou canst not enter into this chapel a cubit high; Are thou not a giant of seven cubits?' (But) thou didst enter and takest thy rest."

This same Bes was a double of the great demiurge Ptah, who could similarly be portrayed as a dwarfish figurine. In this role, he not only guided the pharaoh to the doorway of Nut, but he also was the creator of mankind. In a 4th-century papyrus in the British Museum, the image of Bes as the demiurge is framed by the creatures of his making, a parade of people coming into being, like the Eleusinian procession seeking spiritual rebirth; or, at least, they must be people, except that they look like a single file of mushrooms sprouting around the demiurge, very similar to those found in a well-known rock painting from the Tassili ’n Ajer massif, in southern Algeria, where mushroom-men are depicted running in line and carrying mushrooms in their hands. The metamorphosis of mushrooms into the aboriginal humanoid creatures is not an undocumented idea. There was a Greek tradition that the original inhabitants of the city of Corinth were mushrooms that Sisyphus converted into men.

> Speaking thus, she hitched up her peplum and showed her entire body, including the improper regions; and there was her son Iakchos there, and with his hand he set himself up laughing beneath the breasts of Baubo.
>
> ORPHIC HYMN FRAG. 52 (KERN)

Is it any wonder that the Egyptians held dwarfs in high esteem, some of whom got to be members of the court, as is the case with Seneb, who lived toward the end of the 4th or the beginning of the 5th Dynasty (2500-2400 BCE) and even built himself a tomb in Giza: as proof of the fact that they were not socially marginalized, his own wife, as we can see in the sculptural portrait of the couple preserved in the Louvre, was a woman of normal proportions. But they also recognized a type of royal pygmies, whom they completely distinguished from the others. They called them *dng*, an Egyptian term used as well, in general, for ethnic groups from Central Africa, and they were much appreciated as exotic rarities.

But there is some confusion about the actual stature of Bes. Although indubitably a dwarf, just a cubit tall, he was also a giant of seven cubits. This big-little duality underlies the contradiction that in the 3rd-century BCE Greek Leyden Magical Papyrus, Bes requests a temple of only a cubit's height, although the dead donor points out that he is much too tall to fit within it. Bes could enter his temple of a cubit, despite his height of almost three meters, because in his nature he was consubstantial with distorted visual dualism of the mushroom that opened the gateway.



MUSHROOM IN THE TYMPANUM

Similarly, the pharaoh in the ferry of Bes offers the boatman a house that he has built with his own hands, a jar, a vessel of clay, that he made on the night of the deity's birth, a chapel of the diminutive size to suit him as he emerged as the dwarfish creature through the vulva of the birth goddess.

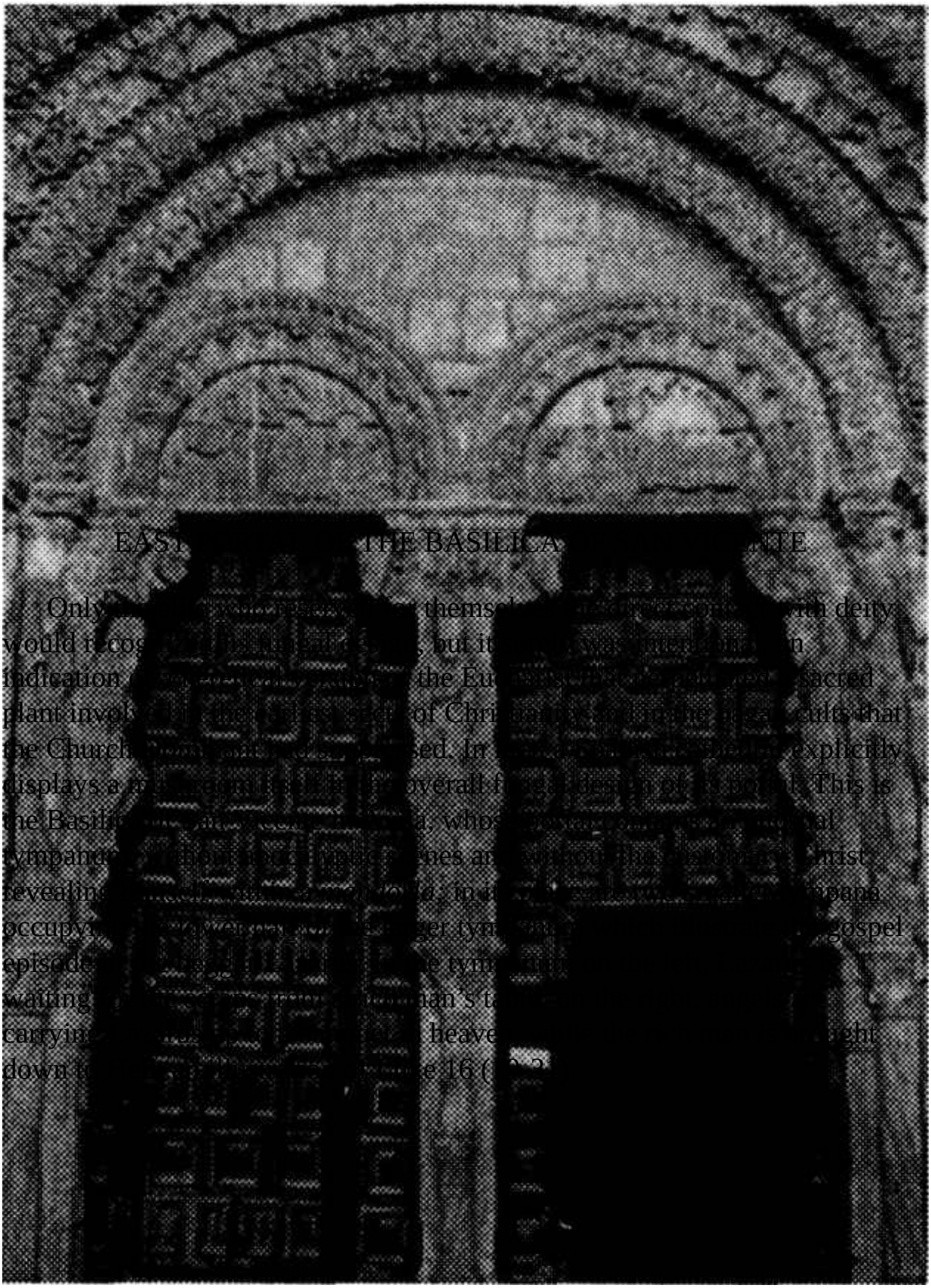
With his oversized head and squat stature, Bes is a version of the same anthropomorphized fungal creature that occurs in the familiar gnomes and dwarves of European lore.

The Flower in the Vulva

THE SEXUAL SYMBOLISM of the entrance into sacred space was perpetuated in Christianity not only by incorporating the vulva of Sheila-na-gig into the almond shape of the mystical *mandorla.* But they also preserved the mushroom as the botanical agent for achieving the vision by employing it as the common design for Romanesque portals. These entrances consist basically of a semicircular tympanum, on which customarily are depicted apocalyptical scenes; below the tympanum, the portal is usually divided by a mullein to make the entrance wider, although even without the mullein, the overall design is that of the cap of a mushroom supported upon its stipe. Significantly, the apocalyptic vision is depicted on the tympanum cap, which is the part of the fly-agaric that contains the psychoactive principles.

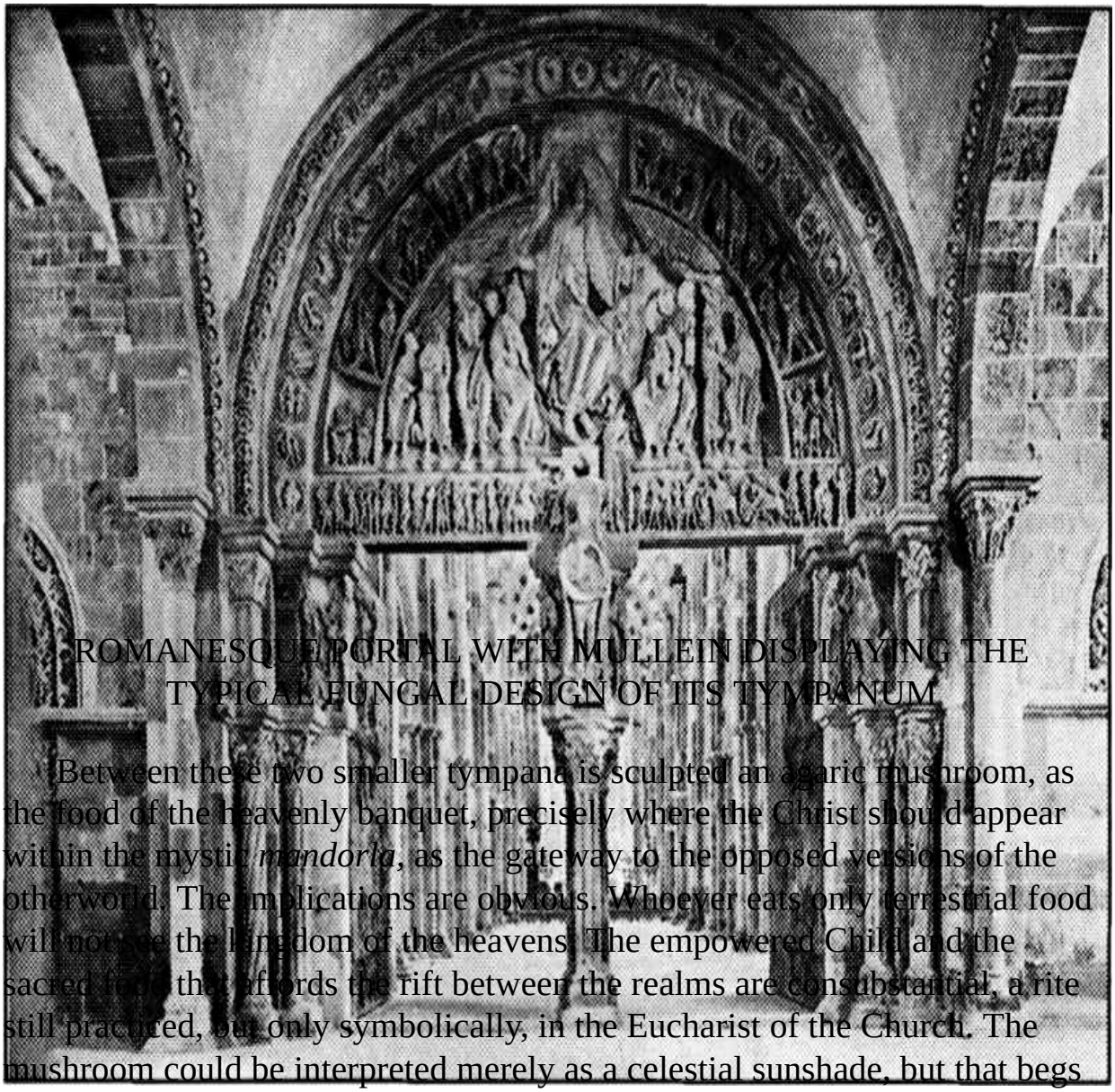
The tympanum, moreover, is basically a vulval *mandorla* halved and rotated horizontal. Both the tympanum and the *mandorla* as an aureole

conferring sanctity traditionally depicts the apotheosis of the Christ journeying from the other realm, in the same way as Iakchos emerging from Baubo.



EAST [illegible] THE BASILICA [illegible] TE

Only [illegible] themsel[illegible] with deity would recog[illegible], but it [illegible] was merely [illegible] an indication [illegible] the Eu[illegible] sacred plant involv[illegible] of Chri[illegible] and the [illegible] cults that the Church [illegible] sed. In [illegible] explicitly displays a [illegible] overall f[illegible] design of [illegible]. This is the Basili[illegible] a, whos[illegible] al tympanu[illegible] nes an[illegible] Christ revealin[illegible] *Io*, in [illegible] pana occupy[illegible] ger tym[illegible] gospel episode[illegible] e tym[illegible] waiting [illegible] ian's t[illegible] carryin[illegible] heave[illegible] ght down [illegible] e 16 ([illegible]



ROMANESQUE PORTAL WITH MULLEIN DISPLAYING THE TYPICAL FUNGAL DESIGN OF ITS TYMPANUM

Between these two smaller tympana is sculpted an agaric mushroom, as the food of the heavenly banquet, precisely where the Christ should appear within the mystic *mandorla*, as the gateway to the opposed versions of the otherworld. The implications are obvious. Whoever eats only terrestrial food will not see the kingdom of the heavens. The empowered Child and the sacred food that affords the rift between the realms are consubstantial, a rite still practiced, but only symbolically, in the Eucharist of the Church. The mushroom could be interpreted merely as a celestial sunshade, but that begs the question. This mushroom is undisputedly a mushroom, which implies that the more stylized sunshades are as much mushrooms as the parasol foot of the Shade-foot creatures.

The plant that functions as a symbolic substitute for a psychoactive agent is the fig tree.

The Fig Tree

LIKE BAUBO AND BES, the Egyptian goddess Hathor also exposed herself obscenely to cheer her father Ra. The gods were in Tribunal, disagreeing about the successor to the dead Osiris, either his son Horus or his brother Seth. Ra sickened and retired to his private quarters for an entire day, and his daughter displayed her vulva and restored him. Beyond the cene jest, what Ra must have seen was he chosen successor Horus emerging, which thus decided the outcome of the dispute. In all these mythical versions, what cheers the deity is not the obscenity, but the view of the opened gateway through the vulva.

CUT FIG RESEMBLES THE VULVA

In Egyptian traditions, Hathor empowered the pharaoh, feeding him with the elixir of her celestial milk, flowing from her sycamore fig tree. Romulus and Remus, the founders of Rome, were suckled by a she-wolf beneath such a tree. Demeter was similarly associated with the fig tree, and the relationship of the mother and the empowered child passed on into Christian traditions: in the Apocryphal Gospels, there was a sycamore called the Pharaoh's Fig in the Egyptian town of Mathave that opened to hide within it the Virgin Mary and the Christ as they fled from Herod's wrath. The Egyptian tree often grew on the edge of the desert, indicating a source of subterranean water, which made it a fitting marker for the entrance to the otherworld.

Hathor could also be depicted as the over-arched celestial cow, suckling the empowered pharaoh. In the Vedic tradition, the Soma mushroom was personified as a cow with a full udder like Hathor channeling the drink from the milky heavens. And similarly, an anthropomorphic vessel from Minoan Crete for dispensing the sacrament depicts a woman milking her teats, which form the container's spouts. Such vessels were not intended for ordinary tableware, but were more in the nature of a sacred chalice.

Demeter was said to have given the first fig tree to Phytalos on the banks of the Kephisos River to reward him for the hospitality he offered her as she journeyed out of Athens on what would later become the Sacred Road on her way toward Eleusis. The oval seed-filled fruit of the fig resembles the vulva as the entrance to the spiritual womb of the goddess, making it the

equivalent of the almond tree and the symbolic *mandorla* as the gateway to paradise. The initiates passed the tomb of the dead hero as they retraced the route of the goddess.

The Greek word for fig (*sykon*, cognate with Latin *ficus*) was a metaphor for the vagina, preserved in the Italian *fica* for "vulva." The fruit's notorious laxative properties figure in ancient medicine and made it and similar intestinal cathartics, like buckthorn, sacred to the underworld. And the abduction itself could be sexually associated with its agency, so that Dionysus bore the epithet of "Fig" (*Kradaios* and *Sykites*), and the first phallus was constructed of its wood: and the tree was also sacred to the god's ithyphallic son Priapos. The tree was also called *krade* in Greek, allowing confusion with *kradie* (Homeric metathesis for *kardia*) or cardiac "heart" so that Semele was sometimes said to have conceived Dionysus by drinking a potion compounded from his "heart."

> His heart was very, very saddened, and he was alone. After a long time, Hathor, the Lady of the Southern Sycamore, came, stayed with her father, the Lord of the Universe, and uncovered her nudeness before him. Then the great god burst into laughter because of her, then got up and (went to) take his seat with the Great Ennead.
>
> CHESTER BEATTY PAPYRUS C. 1550 BCE

The fig, however, as the vulva Entrance of figures like Baubo, was as hermaphroditically ambiguous as she. The mimetically sexual contemptuous gesture of thrusting the thumb between the fore and middle fingers is called the "fig," going back to medieval French *faire le figue* or "make the fig," and it appears to have entered English in the Elizabethan Age from Spanish *dar la higa.* The configuration of the thumb penetrating the thighs of the fore and middle fingers is graphically the same as the revelation of the obscene dances.

The gesture is similar to the middle finger sign, which the Romans called the *digitus impudicus;* and indeed the "fig" represents not only the vulva, but

it also suggests the penetrating penis, since the external appearance of the fig's fruit resembles the male genitals, as does also the shape of the fig leaf. The fig gesture is the etymology of sycophant as supposedly someone who curried favor with the authorities by "showing the fig" (from Greek *sykon phanein* or "to show the fig"), but this interpretation as referring to a person who informed against someone illegally exporting contraband figs from Athens is now generally dismissed. It is more likely that the term refers to some ingratiating flatterer willing to go so far as expose himself, either genitally or, more probably annually, with the male version of the vulva.

But in addition, although obviously not psychoactive, the fig has connotations, not only as a plant of divine empowerment, but of visionary wisdom. Figs were known for inducing both lust and knowledge; thus the fauns and pagan gods of Gaul were called *ficarii* or "fig-men." A similar implication of the fruit's metaphoric properties as chemically psychoactive occurs in the Greek *philosykos* or "fig-lover," which probably describes such a lasciviously sexual person, but, of course, implies a pun upon "philosopher" or *philosophos,* a lover of wisdom.

The Italian *mano fico,* also called simply a *fica*, is worn as an apotropaic amulet, similar to the *mal occhio* or "evil eye," the latter also well represented around the globe and often associated with various deities, hence the "eye of Buddha," etc.; its dilated pupil is meant to mirror the malignant glance and hence deflect it back upon its agent, but it is also emblematic of someone experiencing a vision. The Egyptian version is the eye of Horus, a highly stylized mushroom, complete with annulus ring as the tears of divine fluid flowing from it; as the Pyramid Texts make clear, it was something edible that conferred divinity. The *mano fico,* however, maintains its sexual connotations and is worn only by men to ward off impotency.

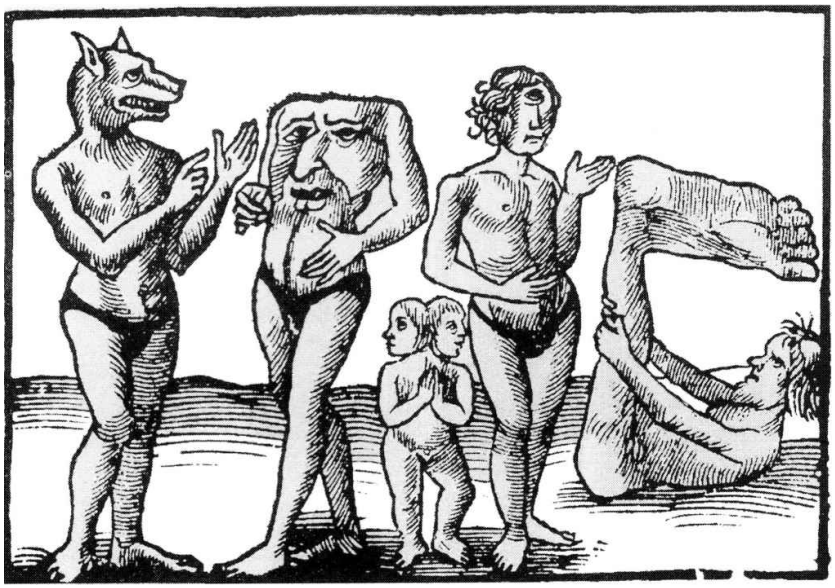
This is the same tree that was the original of the Garden in Eden, for which reason Adam and Eve had its leaves ready at hand to cover their nakedness, hence the curious custom of covering the embarrassing nudeness of Classical sculptures with an affixed fig leaf. The Hebrew folkloric collection known as the Haggadah specifically identifies the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge as the fig. The woman's name became Anglicized as Eve, Hava in Latin, which means "the mother of all" (*mater cunctorum viventium, Genesis* 3.4-5), from the Hebrew Havvah, or "Life, the Living One," in Greek Zoë, which was the Canaanite epithet of Asherah, the great Mother

Goddess, consort of the high god El, who was syncretized with Yahweh, until the reforms of the late 7th century abolished her cult. Her emblems were the Tree, the Cosmic Axis, and the Serpent. And her cult was orgiastic, an ecstatic shamanism, affording direct and easy access to the divine.

> As the bride and groom are led out into the fields to lie together, "What'll we do with her? Eat her, eat her! Lift up the bridegroom. He'll have no trouble picking figs; just look at how big and thick it is! And look at how sweet is her fig! You'll agree once you eat her with lots of wine!"
>
> ARISTOPHANES PEACE 1350 SQ.

The visionary nature of the fig tree is preserved in the curious episode in the gospel of Luke about the tax collector Zacchaeus who wanted to see Jesus, but being too short, he climbed a sycamore fig to catch a glimpse of the deity. Thus also was Amos a tender of sycamore figs, when the Lord spoke to him, commanding him to be a prophet unto the people of Israel. The Buddha was said to have received enlightenment under a fig tree. The ambivalence of the Judeo-Christian tradition to this Tree of Knowledge and its in-dwelling goddess can be sensed in the prohibition against eating its figs that make man the equal of god, with the Knowledge of good and evil, reinterpreting its fruit as the "bad" (*malum*) "apple" (*malum*), homophonous in Latin, the latter designating any fruit that, unlike a nut, is fleshy on the outside, including pomegranates and figs: the fruit is not named in *Genesis,* although it was recognized as the fig still in medieval times, but the force of the pun became irresistible, probably reinforced by pagan traditions of an apple-like magical fruit.

That fruit was probably the fly-agaric mushroom. The sycamore fig, in fact, produces clusters of red fruits, spotted with white. It also attracts wasps, needed for its pollination; all manner of flying insects represent the souls scurrying to their final destination, and each fruit became the wasp's tomb, like the supposedly fatal attraction of the fly to the agaric's visionary toxins.



SHADE-FOOT, WITH TONGUE-IN-BELLY AND ONE-EYED CYCLOPS, ALONG WITH OTHER PERSONIFICATIONS OF THE SACRED MUSHROOM; SEBASTIAN MUNSTER, COSMOGRAPHIA, BASEL, 1544,

with R. Gordon Wasson

3

Mushrooms

THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LACKS an indigenous word to designate the higher fungi. There are only four words for this remarkable plant. Three of them are borrowed importations from other languages: the Latin quasi-scientific fungus, which is metaphoric and cognate with sponge, descriptive of its spongy texture; and the two words borrowed from the French: mushroom, from *mousseron*, of uncertain derivation; and champignon, descriptive of its habitat in the champs or fields.

Toadstools

THE ONLY TRULY ENGLISH WORD is a folkloric metaphor, the toadstool, a pejorative designation embracing all those fungal growths that the user distrusts, whether rightly or wrongly. The fact that English has no real word for the plant, since the foreign importations distance the English speaker from it, speaks volumes, as does the loathsomeness of the toad's stool, which is suggestive as well of the dwarfish creatures like fairies that were thought to materialize from the plant or sit upon its throne. A similar lack of an authentic word for this common plant can be traced back to the hypothetical Indo-European parent of the ancient Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin languages, and their dialectal derivatives in the modern Romance languages of Europe. The plant was apparently too sacred to be afforded a true name, like the prohibition of calling upon a deity like Yahweh by his true name, for fear of

conjuring his apotheosis or even more, of committing the blasphemy of forcing him to one's will through the magic of knowing his secret name. Hence the Soma god has no name, Soma being a metaphor of him as the "Pressed One"; and his botanic identity lies hidden beneath a plethora of metaphors, such as the parasol or the wheel with spokes, both perfectly applicable to a mushroom.

> Had nature any outcast face, Could she a son contemn, Had nature an Iscariot, That mushroom—it is him.
>
> EMILY DICKENSON, THE MUSHROOM IS THE ELF OF PLANTS.

Other languages, like Russian, have a vast vocabulary for the mushrooms. Now that at long last the world is coming to know these fungal growths in all their myriad shapes and colors and smells and textures, perhaps this novel usage will at last put an end to the phobia that the Anglo-Saxon R. Gordon Wasson and his Russian-born wife Valentina Pavlovna discovered divided cultures along the fault line of their attitudes to this beautiful product of nature, with the evolution over the past century of a new scientific discipline. Ethnomycology is simply the study of the role of mushrooms, in the broadest sense, in the past of the human race; and it is a branch of ethnobotany.

Valentina in the Catskills

IT WAS A STORY that eventually acquired the status of myth, the quest of Persephone for the narcotic flower that opened the vision to another world. "I will draw an account of our mushroom quest," R. Gordon Wasson wrote, in his final book, *Persephone's Quest*, which appeared just before his death in 1986, "Valentina Pavlovna my late Russian wife's and mine." In August of 1927, they were celebrating a delayed honeymoon in a friend's lent chalet in the Catskills. After lunch, they took a walk down a path that led

eventually upwards to a slope toward a forested mountain. *"Suddenly, before I knew it, my bride threw down my hand roughly and ran up into the forest, with cries of ecstasy. She had seen toadstools growing, toadstools of many kinds that peopled the forest floor. She cried out in delight at their beauty. She addressed each kind with an affectionate Russian name. Such a display she had not seen since she left her family's dacha near Moscow, almost a decade before. She knelt before those toadstools in poses of adoration like the Virgin hearkening to the Angel of the Annunciation. She had not seen the like since Russia, since 1917. She was in a delirium of excitement and began gathering them right and left in her skirt."* Wasson was aghast: *" 'Come back, come back to me! They are poisonous, putrid. They are toadstools. Come back to me!' She only laughed the more: her merry laughter will ring forever in my ears."*

It was, as he said, their "first marital crisis." In five years of courtship, they had never discussed anything as fundamental as mushrooms, and *"here she was possessed by the mushrooms!" She insisted on incorporating them into the dinner she prepared. "I was beside myself. I acted the perfect Anglo-Saxon oaf confronting a wood nymph. That evening she seasoned the soup with the fungi, she garnished the meat with other fungi. Yet others she threaded together and strung up to dry, for winter use as she said. My discomfiture was complete. That night I ate nothing with mushrooms in it. Frantic and deeply hurt, I was led to wild ideas: I told her that I would wake up a widower,"* which would have fit the myth, but he later denied this allegation.

The Wellsprings of Cultural History

BUT THEY DID BEGIN TO WONDER why they had such different attitudes to a common plant, and they discovered among their respective friends the same dichotomy, the irrational fear of all mushrooms among the Anglo-Saxons, contrasting with the special fondness of Tina's Slavs. While they each pursued their individual careers, his eventually as a banker, and hers as a pediatrician, they found themselves drawn as an avocation to this weird innate difference in their attitude toward mushrooms. They spent years gathering instances of mushrooms in literature and art, noting the special role that the plant played in the imaginations of diverse cultures.

As amateurs in ethnography, botany, and languages, the Wassons always sought out experts in the various fields in the thirty years they devoted to the subject together, and they came to suspect that the differing attitudes to the humble mushroom, testified to some deep-seated religious phenomenon.

As Gordon Wasson says:

> *THE RUSSIAN POETS AND NOVELISTS filled their writings with mushrooms, always in a loving context. It would seem to a stranger that every Russian poet composes verses on mushroom gathering almost as a rite of passage to qualify for mature rating! In English the silence of many writers about mushrooms is deafening: Chaucer and Milton never mention them, the others seldom. For Shakespeare, Spenser, William Penn, Laurence Sterne (extensively), Shelley, Keats, Tennyson, for Edgar Allan Poe and D. H. Lawrence and Emily Dickinson, 'mushroom' and 'toadstool' are unpleasant, even disgusting epithets. Our poets when they do mention them link them to decay and death. We began to cast our net wider and to study all the peoples of Europe, not only the German and French and Italians, but more especially the peripheral cultures, out of the main stream, where archaic forms and beliefs survive longest — the Albanian, Frisian, Lappish, Basque, Catalonian and Sardinian, Icelandic and Faroese, and of course the Hungarian and the Finnish. In all our inquiries and travels we looked, not to the erudite, but to the humble and illiterate peasants as our most cherished informants. We explored their knowledge of mushrooms and the uses to which they put them. We were careful also to take the flavor of the scabrous and erotic vocabularies often neglected by lexicographers. We examined the common names for mushrooms in all these cultures, seeking the fossil metaphors hiding in their etymologies, to discover what those metaphors expressed, whether a favorable or unfavorable attitude toward our earthy creatures.*

[Gordon Wasson has] made the specialty of mycology something of universal importance and one of the pillars of anthropology and the

history of religions.

OCTAVIO PAZ

Looking back on his long and wide ranging investigations, Gordon summed it up: *I suggest that when such traits betoken the attitudes of whole tribes or peoples, and when those traits have remained unaltered throughout recorded history, and especially when they differ from one people to another neighboring people, then you are face to face with a phenomenon of profound cultural importance, whose primal cause is to be discovered only in the wellsprings of cultural history.*

Mushroom Phobias

A LITTLE THING, some of you may say, this difference in emotional attitude toward wild mushrooms. But my wife and I did not think so, and we devoted most of our leisure hours for decades to dissecting it, defining it, and tracing it to its origin. Such discoveries as we have made, including the rediscovery of the religious role for the hallucinogenic mushrooms of Mexico, can be laid to our preoccupation with that cultural rift between my wife and me, between our respective peoples, between the mycophilia and mycophobia (words that we devised for our two attitudes) that divide the Indo-European peoples into two camps. If this hypothesis of ours be wrong, then it must have been a singular false hypothesis to have borne the fruit that it has. But it is not wrong. Thanks to the immense strides made in the study of the human psyche in this century, we are all now aware that deep-seated emotional attitudes acquired in early life are of profound importance.

‘Toadstool’ was originally the specific name of A. muscaria, the divine mushroom, of a beauty befitting its divinity.

Our card files and correspondence kept expanding and in the end, sometime in the early 1940s, we sat down, Tina and I, and asked ourselves what we were going to do with all our data. We decided to write a book, but there were so many lacunae in our evidence that it would be years before we could put words to paper. In our conversations at that time we found that we had been thinking along the same lines, afraid to express our thoughts even to each other: they were too fantastic. We had both come to discern a period long long ago, long before our ancestors knew how to write, when those ancestors must have regarded a mushroom as a divinity or quasi-divinity. We knew not which mushroom(s) nor why. In the days of Early Man his whole world was shot through with religious feeling and the unseen powers held him in thrall. Our sacred 'mushroom' must have been wondrous indeed, evoking awe and adoration, fear, yes, even terror. When that early cult gave way to new religions and to novel ways emerging with a literate culture, the emotions aroused by the old cult would survive, truncated from their roots. In one area the fear and terror would live on, either of a particular mushroom (as in the case of A. muscaria); *or else, as the emotional focus through taboo became vague, of 'toadstools' in general; and in another area, for a reason that we cannot now tell, it was the spirit of love and adoration that survived. Here would lie the explanation of the mycophobia vs. mycophilia that we had discovered.*

Through taboo, 'toadstool' lost its focus and came to hover over the whole of the mushroom tribe that the mycophobe shuns.

The Mexican Veladas

IT WAS IN MEXICO that our pursuit of a hypothetical sacred mushroom first achieved its goal. On 19 September 1952 we received in the post two letters from Europe: one from Robert Graves enclosing a cutting from a pharmaceutical journal in which there were quotations from

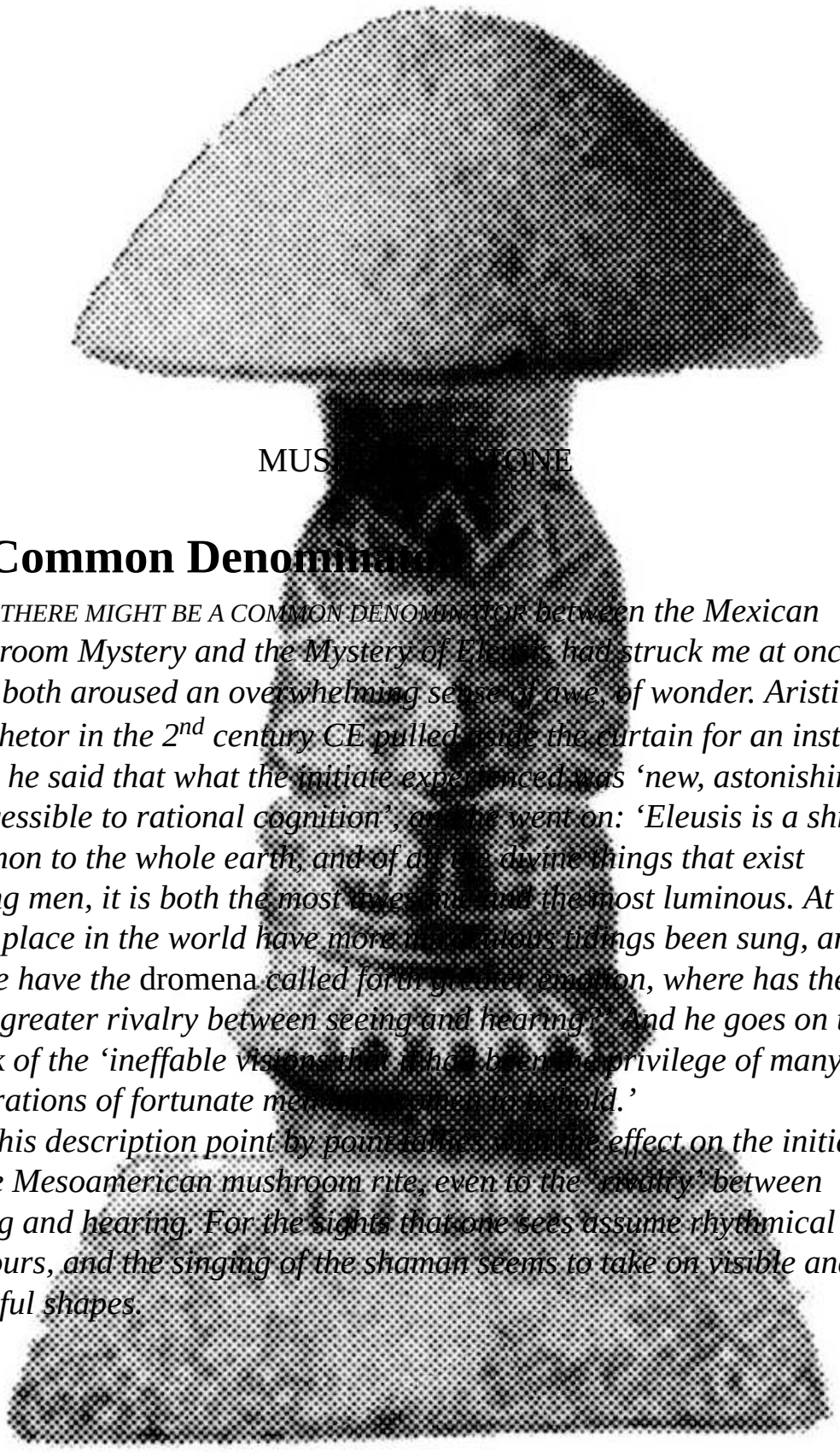
Richard Evans Schultes, who in turn cited a number of 16th century Spanish friars telling of a strange mushroom cult among the Indians of Mesoamerica; the second from Giovanni Mardersteig, our printer in Verona, sending us his sketch of a curious archaeological artifact from Mesoamerica. It was exhibited in the Rietberg Museum of Zurich. The artifact was of stone, about a foot high, obviously a mushroom, with a radiant being carved on the stem or what mycologists call the stipe.

MARIA SABINA

Here was perhaps the very cult we were seeking, well within our reach. Earlier we had resolved that we would avoid the New World and Africa to our immediate west where we felt huge and our hands were full with Eurasia. But in Africa we changed our minds and the course of our studies, and we concentrated on Mexico and Guatemala. We had been postulating a wild mushroom as a focus of religious devotion, a fantastic surmise. Now here it was on our doorstep. All that winter we went racing through the texts of the 16th-century Spanish friars and what extraordinary narratives they give us! We flew down to Mexico in the summer of 1953 and for many rainy seasons there after, with wonderful cooperation from everyone in that country, on the night of 29-30 June 1955, we finally made our breakthrough: my photographer and friend Allan Richardson and I participated with our Indian friends in a midnight agape conducted by a shaman of extraordinary quality

16TH CENTURY AZTEC CODEX SPEAKING TO A MAN EATING MUSHROOMS.

This was the first time on record that anyone of the alien race had shared in such a communion. It was a soul-shattering experience. The wild surmise that we had dared to postulate in a whisper to each other years before was at last vindicated.



MUS[illegible]ONE

The Common Denomina[illegible]

THAT THERE MIGHT BE A COMMON DENOMINATOR between the Mexican mushroom Mystery and the Mystery of Eleusis had struck me at once. They both aroused an overwhelming sense of awe, of wonder. Aristides the Rhetor in the 2nd century CE pulled aside the curtain for an instant when he said that what the initiate experienced was 'new, astonishing, inaccessible to rational cognition', and he went on: 'Eleusis is a shrine common to the whole earth, and of all the divine things that exist among men, it is both the most awesome and the most luminous. At what place in the world have more meritorious tidings been sung, and where have the dromena *called forth greater emotion, where has there been greater rivalry between seeing and hearing?' And he goes on to speak of the 'ineffable visions that it has been the privilege of many generations of fortunate men and women to behold.'*

This description point by point [illegible] the effect on the initiate of the Mesoamerican mushroom rite, even to the 'rivalry' between seeing and hearing. For the sights that one sees assume rhythmical contours, and the singing of the shaman seems to take on visible and colorful shapes.

WASSON AND VALENTINA

There seems to have been a saying among the Greeks that mushrooms were the 'food of the Gods', broma theon, *and Porphyrius is quoted as having called them 'nurslings of the Gods'*, theotrophos. *The Greeks of the classic period were mycophobes. Was this not because their ancestors had felt that the whole fungal tribe was infected 'by attraction' with the holiness of the sacred mushroom, and that mushrooms were therefore to be avoided by mortal men? Are we not dealing with what was in origin a religious taboo?*

The Two Ways

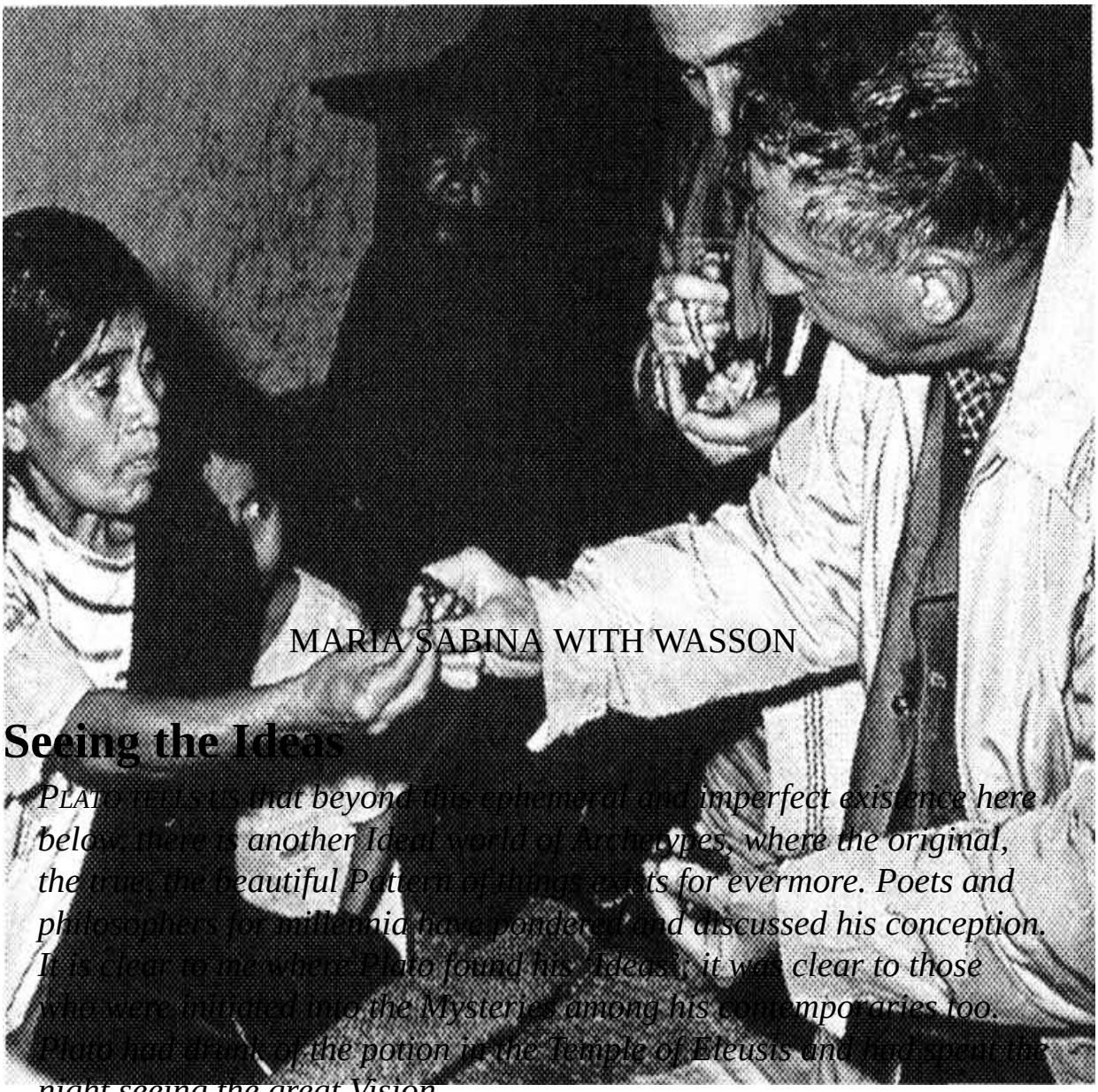
I WOULD NOT BE UNDERSTOOD *as contending that only these alkaloids (wherever found in nature) bring about visions and ecstasy. Clearly some poets and prophets and many mystics and ascetics seem to have enjoyed ecstatic visions that answer the requirements of the ancient Mysteries and that duplicate the mushroom agape of Mexico. I do not suggest that St. John of Patmos ate mushrooms in order to write the* Book of the Revelation. *Yet the succession of images in his Vision, so clearly seen but such a phantasmagoria, means for me that he was in the same state as one be-mushroomed. Nor do I suggest for a moment*

that William Blake knew the mushroom when he wrote this telling account of the clarity of 'vision':

> 'The Prophets describe what they saw in Vision as real and existing men, whom they saw with their imaginative and immortal organs; the Apostles the same; the clearer the organ the more distinct the object. A Spirit and a Vision are not, as the modern philosophy supposes, a cloudy vapour, or a nothing: they are organized and minutely articulated beyond all that the mortal and perishing nature can produce. He who does not imagine in stronger and better lineaments, and in stronger and better light than his perishing eye can see, does not imagine at all."
>
> William Blake

This must sound cryptic to one who does not share Blake's vision or who has not taken the mushroom. The advantage of the mushroom is that it puts many, if not everyone, within reach of this state without having to suffer the mortifications of Blake and St. John. It permits you to see, more clearly than our perishing mortal eye can see, vistas beyond the horizons of this life, to travel backwards and forwards in time, to enter other planes of existence, even (as the Indians say) to know God. It is hardly surprising that your emotions are profoundly affected, and you feel that an indissoluble bond unites you with the others who have shared with you in the sacred agape. All that you see during this night has a pristine quality: the landscape, the edifices, the carvings, the animals—they look as though they had come straight from the Maker's workshop. This newness of everything—it is as though the world had just dawned—overwhelms you and melts you with its beauty. Not unnaturally, what is happening to you seems to you freighted with significance, beside which the humdrum events of everyday are trivial. All these things you see with an immediacy of vision that leads you to

say to yourself, 'Now I am seeing for the first time, seeing direct, without the intervention of mortal eyes.'



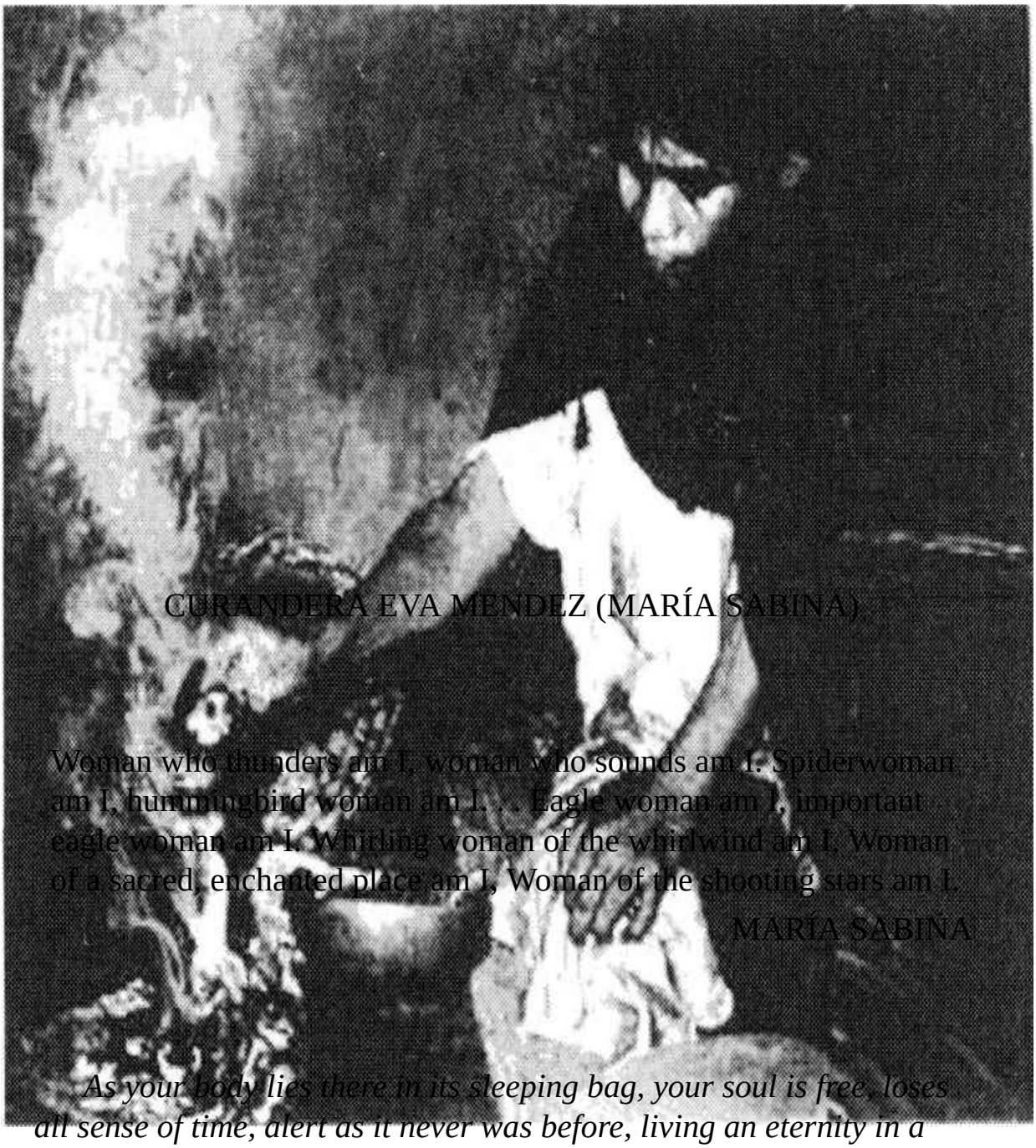
MARIA SABINA WITH WASSON

Seeing the Ideas

PLATO TELLS US that beyond this ephemeral and imperfect existence here below, there is another Ideal world of Archetypes, where the original, the true, the beautiful Pattern of things exists for evermore. Poets and philosophers for millennia have pondered and discussed his conception. It is clear to me where Plato found his 'Ideas'; it was clear to those who were initiated into the Mysteries among his contemporaries too. Plato had drunk of the potion in the Temple of Eleusis and had spent the night seeing the great Vision.

And all the time that you are seeing these things, the priestess in Mexico sings, not loud, but with authority. The Indians are notoriously not given to displays of inner feelings—except on these occasions. The singing is good, but under the influence of the mushroom you think it is infinitely tender and sweet. It is as though you were hearing it with your mind's ear, purged of all dross. You are lying on a petate or mat;

perhaps, if you have been wise, on an air mattress and in a sleeping bag. It is dark, for all lights have been extinguished save a few embers among the stones on the floor and the incense in a sherd. It is still, for the thatched hut is apt to be some distance away from the village. In the darkness and stillness, that voice hovers through the hut, coming now from beyond your feet, now at your very ear, now distant, now actually underneath you, with strange ventriloquistic effect. The mushrooms produce this illusion also. Everyone experiences it, just as do the tribesmen of Siberia who have eaten of Amanita muscaria *and lie under the spell of their shamans, displaying as these do their astonishing dexterity with ventriloquistic drum beats. Likewise, in Mexico, I have heard a shaman engage in a most complicated percussive beat: with her hands she hits her chest, her thighs, her forehead, her arms, each giving a different resonance, keeping a complicated rhythm and modulating, even syncopating, the strokes. Your body lies in the darkness, heavy as lead, but your spirit seems to soar and leave the hut, and with the speed of thought to travel where it listeth, in time and space, accompanied by the shaman's singing and by the ejaculations of her percussive chant. What you are seeing and what you are hearing appear as one: the music assumes harmonious shapes, giving visual form to its harmonies, and what you are seeing takes on the modalities of music—the music of the spheres. 'Where has there been greater rivalry between seeing and hearing?' How apposite to the Mexican experience was the ancient Greek's rhetorical question! All your senses are similarly affected: the cigarette with which you occasionally break the tension of the night smells as no cigarette before had ever smelled; the glass of simple water is infinitely better than champagne. Elsewhere I once wrote that the be-mushroomed person is poised in space, a disembodied eye, invisible, incorporeal, seeing but not seen. In truth, he is the five senses disembodied, all of them keyed to the height of sensitivity and awareness, all of them blending into one another most strangely, until the person, utterly passive, becomes a pure receptor, infinitely delicate, of sensations.*



CURANDERA EVA MENDEZ (MARÍA SABINA)

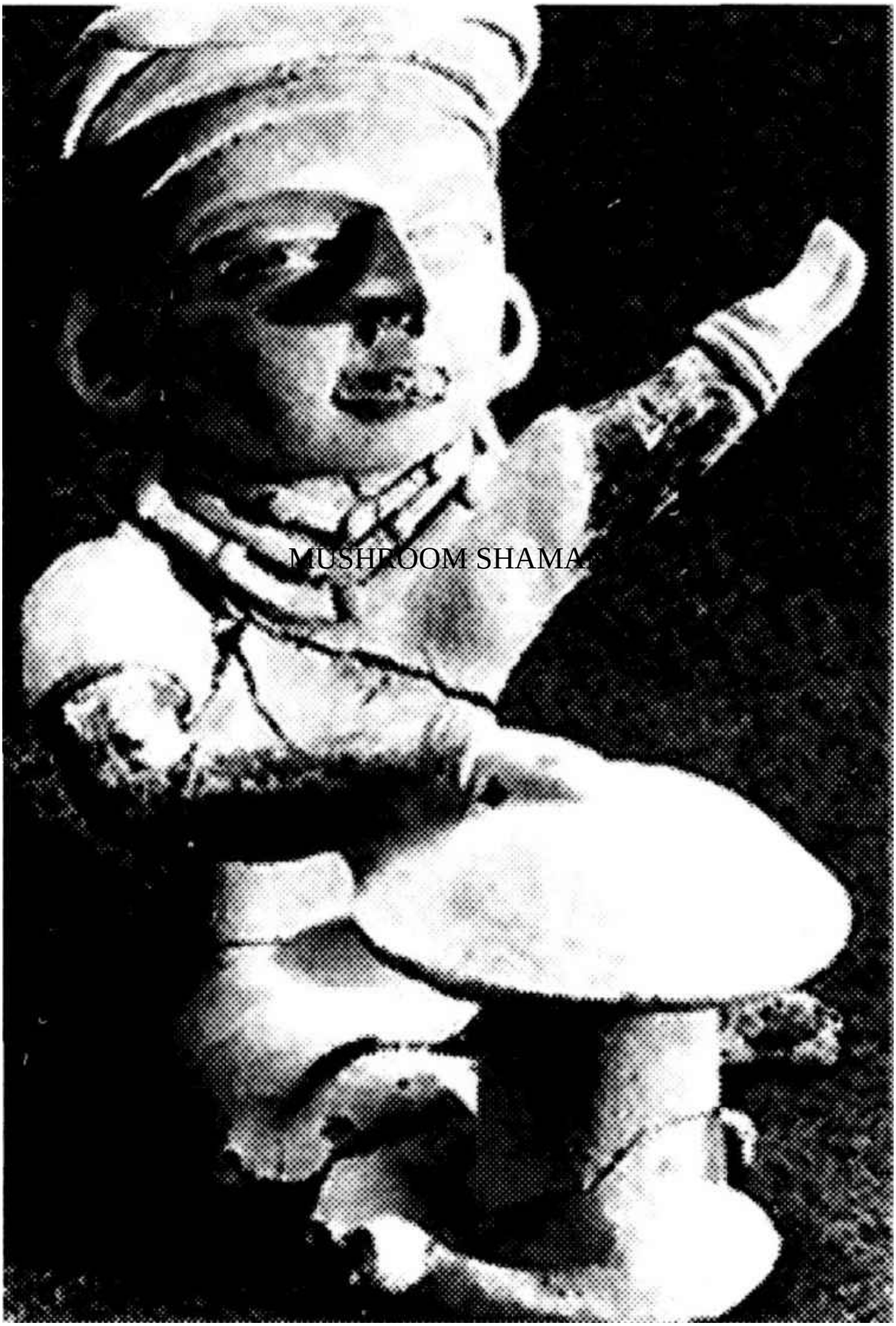
Woman who thunders am I, woman who sounds am I. Spiderwoman am I, hummingbird woman am I. . . Eagle woman am I, important eagle woman am I. Whirling woman of the whirlwind am I, Woman of a sacred, enchanted place am I, Woman of the shooting stars am I.

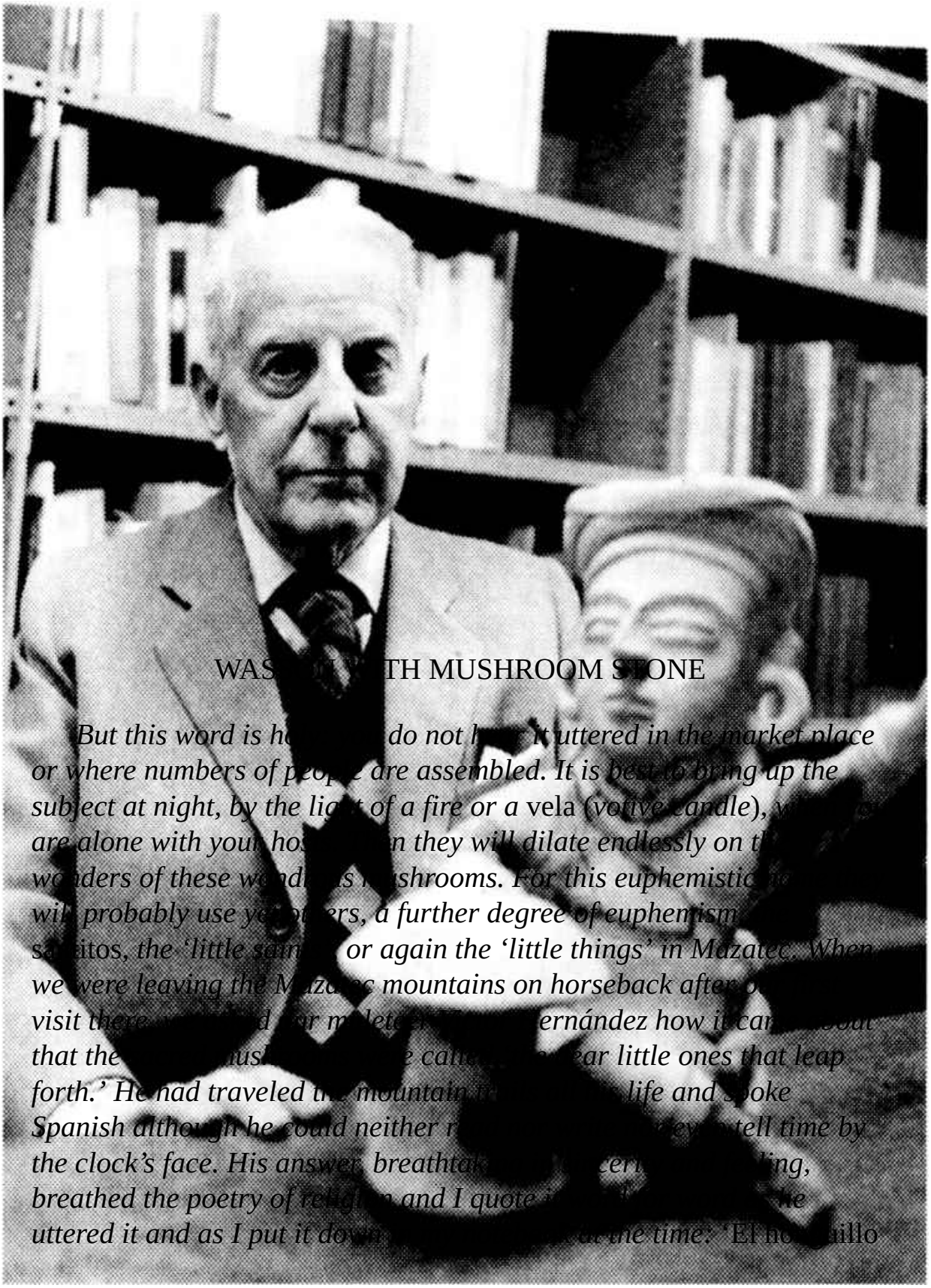
MARÍA SABINA

As your body lies there in its sleeping bag, your soul is free, loses all sense of time, alert as it never was before, living an eternity in a night, seeing infinity in a grain of sand. What you have seen and heard is cut as with a burin in your memory, never to be effaced. At last you know what the ineffable is, and what ecstasy means. Ecstasy! The mind harks back to the origin of that word. For the Greeks ekstasis *meant the flight of the soul from the body. I am certain that this word came into being to describe the effect of the Mystery of Eleusis. Can you find a better word than that to describe the be-mushroomed state?*

The Agony of Ecstasy

IN COMMON PARLANCE, among the many who have not experienced ecstasy, ecstasy is fun, and I am frequently asked why I do not reach for mushrooms every night. But ecstasy is not fun. Your very soul is seized and shaken until it tingles. After all, who will choose to feel undiluted awe, or to float through that door yonder into the Divine Presence? The unknowing vulgar abuse the word, and we must recapture its full and terrifying sense . . . . A few hours later, the next morning, you are fit to go to work. But how unimportant work seems to you, by comparison with the portentous happenings of that night! If you can, you prefer to stay close to the house, and, with those who lived through that night, compare notes, and utter ejaculations of amazement. I will convey to you the overwhelming impression of awe that the sacred mushrooms arouse in the native population of the Mexican highlands. In the Mazatec tribe where I ingested them for the first time these particular mushrooms are not 'mushrooms': they stand apart. One word—thain—*embraces the whole fungal tribe, edible, innocuous but inedible, and toxic,—the whole fungal world except the sacred species. The sacred species are known by a name that in itself is a euphemism for some other name now lost: they are '*nti-xi-thol. (*In Mazatec each syllable must be pronounced in one of four tones or in slides from one tone to another, being the highest. The initial' is a glottal stop*.) *The first element, 'nti, is a diminutive of affection and respect. The second element,* xi tho *means 'that which leaps forth'. The whole word is thus: 'the dear little things that leap forth.'*


MUSHROOM SHAMA



WAS[illegible]TH MUSHROOM STONE

But this word is ho[illegible] do not h[illegible] it uttered in the market place or where numbers of peop[illegible] are assembled. It is best to bring up the subject at night, by the lig[illegible] of a fire or a vela (*votive candle*), *w[illegible] are alone with your hos[illegible]n they will dilate endlessly on th[illegible] wonders of these wond[illegible]s mushrooms. For this euphemistic [illegible] will probably use yet others, a further degree of euphemism [illegible] santitos, the 'little saints' or again the 'little things' in Mazatec. When we were leaving the Mazatec mountains on horseback after o[illegible] visit there [illegible] d[illegible] ar m[illegible]lete [illegible]ernández how it can [illegible]bout that the [illegible]mush[illegible]e call[illegible]ear little ones that leap forth.' He had traveled t[illegible] mountain [illegible] life and spoke Spanish although he could neither r[illegible] [illegible]ey to tell time by the clock's face. His answer, breathtak[illegible]cer[illegible]ing, breathed the poetry of religion and I quote [illegible] he uttered it and as I put it down [illegible] at the time: 'El ho[illegible]illo*

viene por si mismo, no se sabe de donde, como el viento que viene sin saber de donde ni porque.’

A famous English archaeologist specializing in the archaeology of Greece, with whom I had had the friendliest relations for about thirty-five years, wrote me in a letter a little later the following: ‘I do not think that Mycenae had anything to do with the divine mushroom or the Eleusinian mysteries either. May I add a word of warning? Stick to your Mexican mushroom cult and beware of seeing mushrooms everywhere. We much enjoyed your Philadelphia paper and would recommend you keep as close to that as you can. Forgive the frankness of an old friend.’

R. GORDON WASSON

Victor was referring to the genesis of the sacred mushrooms: they leap forth seedless and rootless, a mystery from the beginning. Aurelio Carreras, town slaughterer in Huautla, when we asked him where the mushrooms take you, said simply: Le llevan alli donde dios este, *‘They carry you there where God is.’ According to Ricardo García González of Rio Santiago, ‘To eat the mushrooms you must be clean: they are the blood of our Lord the Eternal Father.’* Hay que ser muy limpio, es la sangre de Nuestro Señor Padre Eterno. *These are Spanish-speaking villagers picked at random. They express religion in its purest essence, without intellectual content.*

Aristotle said of the Eleusinian Mysteries precisely the same: the initiates were to suffer, to feel, to experience certain impressions and moods. They were not to learn anything.

The Fruit of Knowledge

As MAN EMERGED FROM HIS BRUTISH PAST, thousands of years ago, there was a stage in the evolution of his awareness when the discovery of a

mushroom (or was it a higher plant?) with miraculous properties was a revelation to him, a veritable detonator to his soul, arousing in him sentiments of awe and reverence, and gentleness and love, to the highest pitch of which mankind is capable, all those sentiments and virtues that mankind has ever since regarded as the highest attribute of his kind. It made him see what this perishing mortal eye cannot see. How right the Greeks were to hedge about this Mystery, this imbibing of the potion, with secrecy and surveillance! What today is resolved into a mere drug, a tryptamine or lysergic acid derivative, was for him a prodigious miracle, an entheogen animate with deity within, inspiring in him poetry and philosophy and religion. Perhaps with all our modern knowledge we do not need the divine mushrooms any more. Or do we need them more than ever? Some are shocked that the key even to religion might be reduced to a mere drug. On the other hand, the drug is as mysterious as it ever was: 'like the wind that comes we know not whence nor why.' Out of a mere drug comes the ineffable, comes ecstasy. It is not the only instance in the history of humankind where the lowly has given birth to the divine. Altering a sacred text, we would say that this paradox is a hard saying, yet one worthy of all men to be believed.

Saint Catherine of Genova, according to her Latin biographer, employed ground agarics with the result that God "infused such suavity and divine sweetness in her heart that both soul and body were so full as to make her unable to stand."

If our Classical scholars were given the opportunity to attend the rite at Eleusis, to talk with the priestess, what would they not exchange for that chance? They would approach the precinct, enter the hallowed chamber, with the reverence born of the texts venerated by scholars for millennia. How propitious would their frame of mind be, if they were invited to partake of the potion! Well, those rites take place now,

unbeknownst to the Classical scholars, in scattered dwellings, humble, thatched, without windows, far from the beaten track, high in the mountains of Mexico, in the stillness of the night, broken only by the distant barking of a dog or the braying of an ass. Or, since we are in the rainy season, perhaps the Mystery is accompanied by torrential rains and punctuated by terrifying thunderbolts. Then, indeed, as you lie there be-mushroomed, listening to the music and seeing the visions, you know a soul-shattering experience, recalling as you do the belief of some early peoples that mushrooms, the sacred mushrooms, are divinely engendered by Parjanya, the Aryan God of the Lightning-bolt, in the Soft Mother Earth.

> The little mushroom comes of itself, no one knows whence, like the wind that comes we know not whence nor why.
>
> VICTOR HERNÁNDEZ MAZATEC INFORMANT

> The pain was so great that I screamed aloud; but at the same time I felt such an infinite sweetness that I wished the pain to last forever. It was not physical but psychic pain, although it affected the body as well to some degree. It was the sweetest caressing of the soul by God.
>
> ST. TERESA OF ÁVILA

Mushroom as Linguistic mediator

WASSON EVENTUALLY ACQUIRED A PAPER by the brilliant Russian linguist, Vladimir Nikolaevic Toporov, which should have laid the basis for the rebuttal of any criticism of his mycological centricity. Wasson's long-time friend and intellectual supporter, the great linguist and semiotician Roman

Jakobson had called his attention to it and Wasson commissioned a translation into English, which was finally published in the journal *Semiotica:* “On the Semiotics of Mythological Conceptions about Mushrooms.” Combining the discoveries of the structural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss about the role of mushrooms in the culinary and dietary regimes in different cultures, and of the French mycologist Roger Heim on the relationship of mushrooms to other hallucinogens, and of Wasson himself on the role of mushrooms in mythical-mythological systems, in particular in the mushroom cult, Toporov disclosed the exceptional role that mushrooms play in the semiotic systems of diverse peoples. Cultures tend to create similar semiotic oppositional systems (such as sacred and profane, feminine and masculine, raw and cooked, food and poison, celestial and chthonic, decent and indecent or taboo, etc.; and within these dichotomies, the mushroom tends to suggest itself as the archetypal universal classifier, mediating the oppositions. As such, similar semiotic clusters occur around the world among peoples of unrelated languages, and phonetic similarities across languages, like multilingual puns, further extend the vocabulary.

NOTE: R Gordon Wasson’s contribution is interspersed in italics.

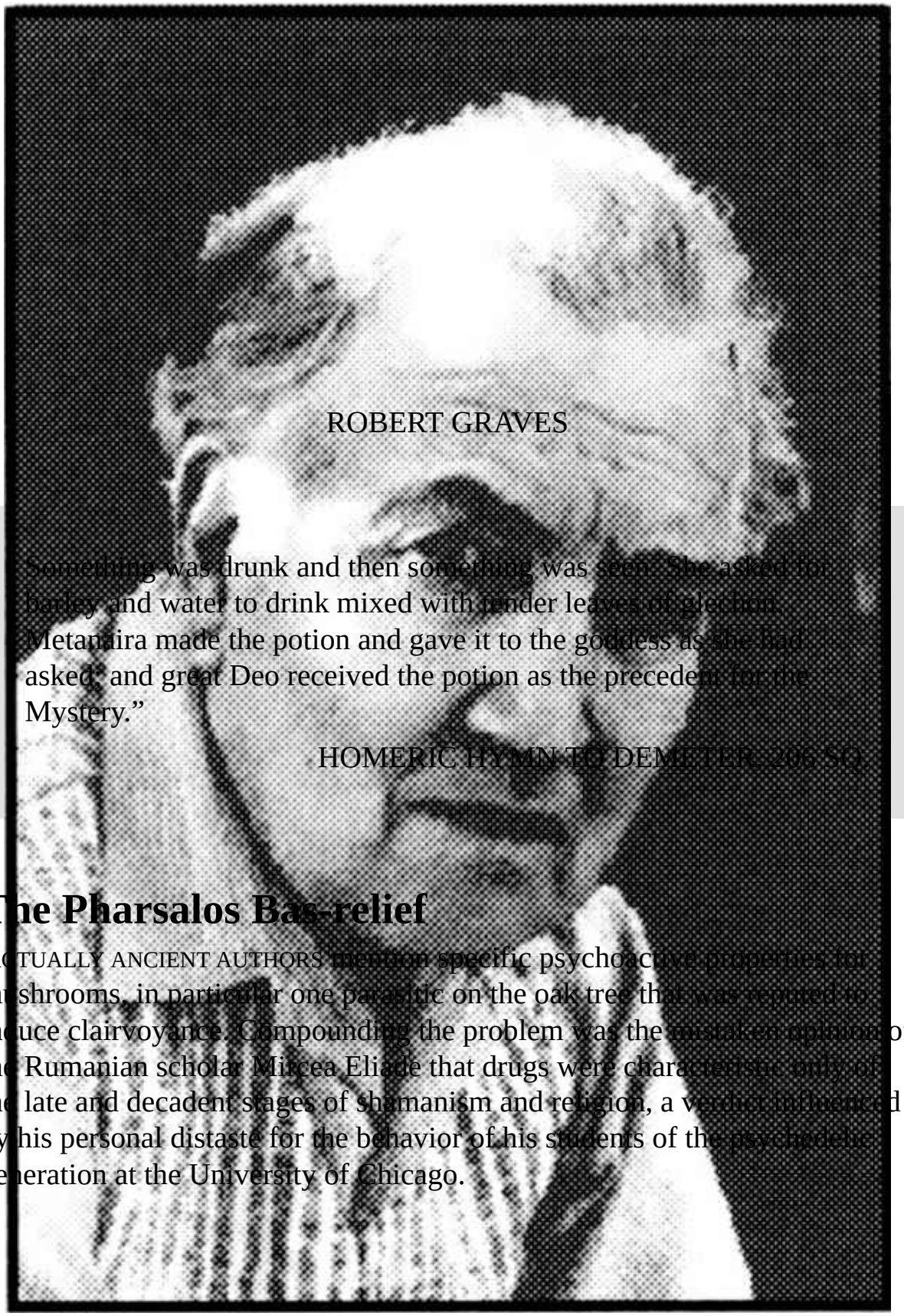
4

Eucharist of Toadstools

IT WAS THE NOVELIST, mythologist, and poet Robert Graves, along with Aldous Huxley, who first called Wasson's attention to the existence of a mushroom cult among the indigenous peoples of Mesoamerica. Graves developed a keen interest in mushrooms and working with Wasson he demonstrated that the Eleusinian *mixed* drink or *kykeon,* like the traditional mixed Homeric drink that the linguist Watkins analyzed, is actually an acrostic for "mushroom." He also suspected that the wise and lascivious forest creatures of pagan Europe who went by the name of "fig-men" existed upon a diet of mushrooms. Graves, unfortunately, was seen as a renegade Classicist, despite his widely acclaimed and well researched historical novels; and his theory, like most of his ideas in myth, was ignored in professional circles.

> Mukais the Greek verbal root for "mushroom." Muketais the Greek for "mushroom." mykes, myketos

The official verdict is that the Greeks and Romans had little use for mushrooms, especially those of the psychoactive type, a result of the fungal phobia of the scholars who studied Classical antiquity, the very aversion from which Wasson had been rescued by his marriage to Valentina.



ROBERT GRAVES

Something was drunk and then something was seen. She asked for barley and water to drink mixed with tender leaves of glechon. Metaneira made the potion and gave it to the goddess as she had asked; and great Deo received the potion as the precedent for the Mystery."

HOMERIC HYMN TO DEMETER, 206 SQ.

The Pharsalos Bas-relief

ACTUALLY ANCIENT AUTHORS mention specific psychoactive properties for mushrooms, in particular one parasitic on the oak tree that was reputed to induce clairvoyance. Compounding the problem was the mistaken opinion of the Rumanian scholar Mircea Eliade that drugs were characteristic only of the late and decadent stages of shamanism and religion, a verdict influenced by his personal distaste for the behavior of his students of the psychedelic generation at the University of Chicago.

PHARSALOS BAS-RELIEF SHOWING MUSHROOMS AND FOOD WALLET.

Thus it was that not even explicit depictions of mushrooms in an Eleusinian context were recognized for what they were; a special scholarly blindness insisted on identifying them as flowers or anything else, but certainly not mushrooms. A friend called Graves' attention to the famous marble bas-relief from Pharsalos in Thessaly, northeast Greece, now in the collection of the Louvre. It depicts the two goddesses, Persephone and Demeter, facing each other, each holding a broad-capped mushroom with bulbous base, probably the *Amanita muscaria*. The one on the left has the 'wallet' or *kibisos*, a leathern food pouch the [illegible] implement of the Mystery used to hide the secret edible object, which here apparently has been removed from its purse. There were originally two food pouches, one for each mushroom; a portion of the second pouch is seen in the hand of the other goddess at the mutilated lower edge of the relief. Nothing could be more explicit: not only mushrooms, but the sacks which were never used for anything but containing something edible!

Which of us knows the future, whatever it is fated to happen for each of us friends? Quick, take and toast these two oak (Amanita) mushrooms!

ANTIPHANES

The Gorgon Head

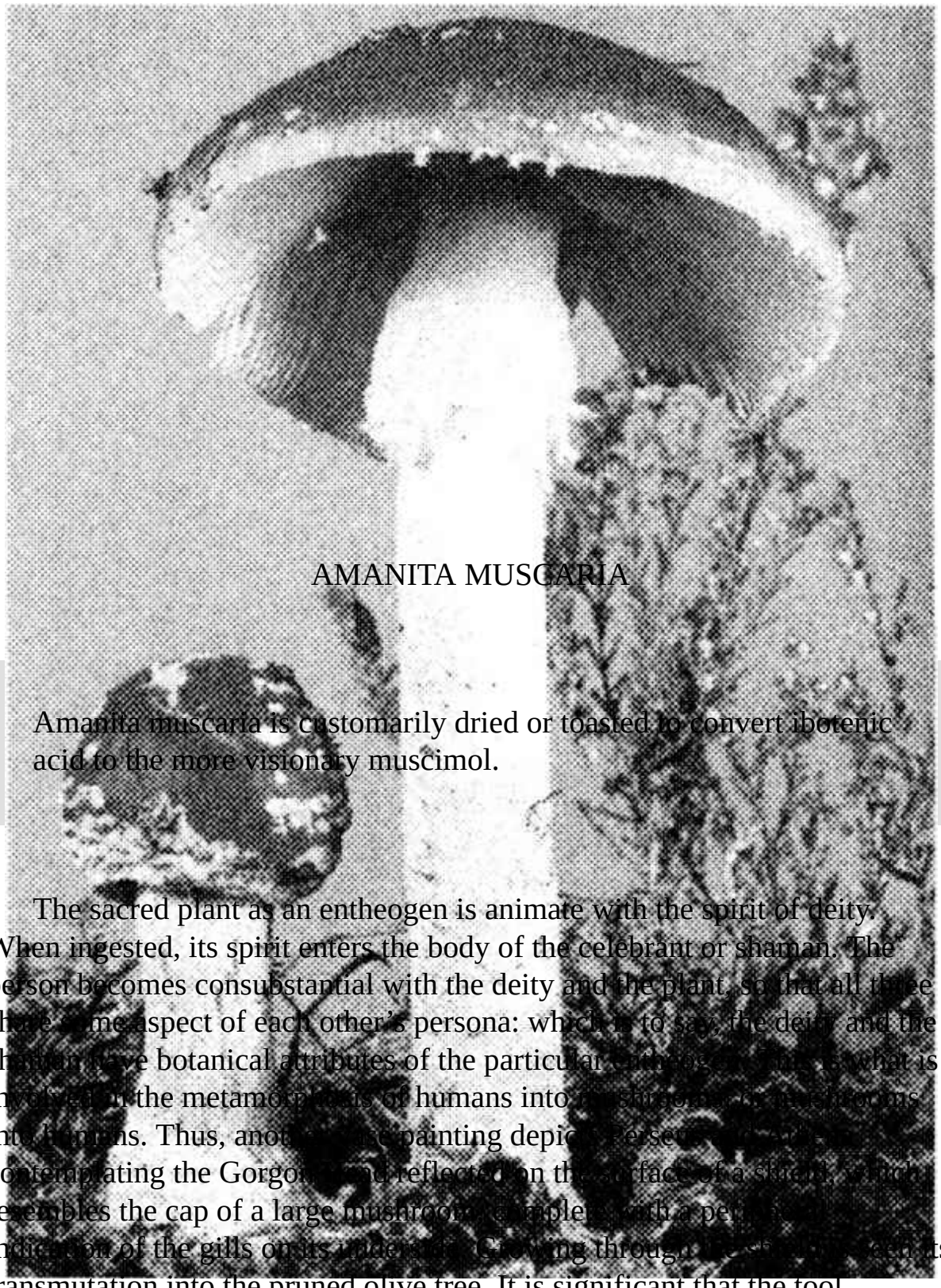
ACTUALLY, SOMETHING ELSE WAS ONCE STORED or hidden in this *kibisos* food-sack or lunch box, as a Byzantine lexicographer defined it. This was the head of the Gorgon Queen Medusa, a creature of such enduring sanctity that the little Byzantine basilica, built with the stones from ancient monuments, beside the modern cathedral today in Athens, is dedicated to the Virgin, with the epithet of Gorgon.

The Gorgons were a sisterhood, whose Queen was the Medusa, which simply means Mistress or Queen in Greek. The hero Perseus quite literally harvested her head, using always a pruning hook for the act, since she obviously had a botanical identity, which after the event was tamed into the sacred olive tree, a plant that requires annual pruning to convert it from the useless thicket of wild olive into the gnarled trunk of the fruit-bearing cultivated tree. After decapitating her, Perseus hid her head in the food sack, a gift to him from the god Hermes. Not only was this Gorgon head botanical, but psychoactive, since her blood was both a panacea and a lethal toxin.

MUKETA
The traditional formulaic drink:
Meli—honey
hudor—water
Karpos—fruit)
Elaios—olive oil
Turos—cheese
Alphita—barley

As for what this plant was before it became the tree sacred to the goddess Athena, who replaced the Gorgon, just as the Virgin would eventually replace Athena: a 4th-century amphora from southern Italy, now in the Pergamonmuseum in Berlin depicts the decapitation as the harvesting of magical golden apples in the Garden of the Hesperid sisterhood. Above Perseus with his waiting food pouch and pruning hook and holding the mushroom-shaped head in his hand are two large mushrooms as annotation for the identity of the magical apples and the Gorgon head, either the *Amanita* or one of the psychoactive *Psilocybes,* although the size suggests the former. The identity of the objects above Perseus' head as mushrooms, moreover, is confirmed by the mythical tradition that Perseus was a 'mushroom-picker.' He was said to have plucked a mushroom beneath the citadel of Mycenae, thereby causing the spring to flow in the subterranean cistern, which was the source of the city's water supply. In doing this, he gave a new, and false, etymology to the name of the city, deriving it from *mykes* or 'mushroom.' The city was already there before this event, which signals its transition from female dominance, as indicated by the symbolism of the famous 'Lion Gate' emblem, to control by the immigrant Indo-European male-dominant culture. The true meaning of its name is derived from the plurality of the sisterhood of the Mycenae maidens and the Queen, analogous to the Gorgons with their Medusa. That eponymous queen was known as one of the great Ladies of the past, "garlanded" Mykene, the daughter of the local river Inachos, and wife of Arestor; together, they were the parents of the cowherd Argos, who tended the cow-maiden Io. The Lady's consort also took his name from her as Mykeneus, whose botanic nature is indicated by his being the son of a "Sown-man." The mushroom is very much a part of the traditions of the Mycenaean citadel. Another mushroom lady went by the name of Mykale; she came from Thessaly and was a great herbalist witch, able to call the moon down from the sky, which was the traditional feat ascribed such women.

MUKA
Minthion—mint or glechon
hudor—water
Kyklomenon—mixed
Alphitois—with barley



AMANITA MUSCARIA

Amanita muscaria is customarily dried or toasted to convert ibotenic acid to the more visionary muscimol.

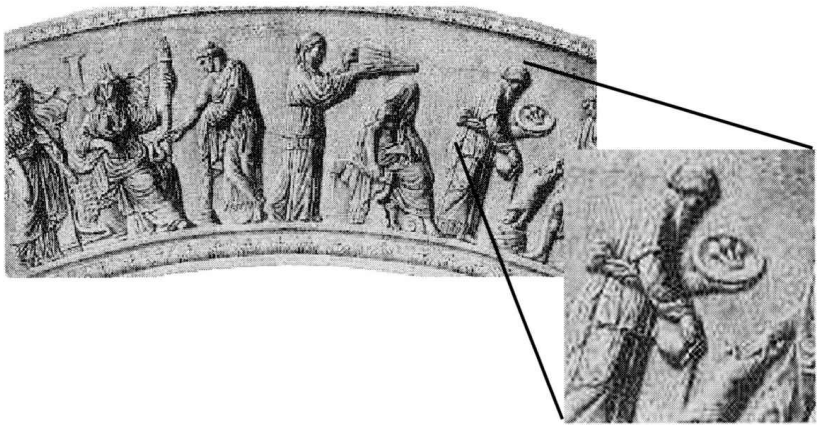
The sacred plant as an entheogen is animate with the spirit of deity. When ingested, its spirit enters the body of the celebrant or shaman. The person becomes consubstantial with the deity and the plant, so that all three share some aspect of each other's persona: which is to say, the deity and the shaman have botanical attributes of the particular entheogen. This is what is involved in the metamorphosis of humans into mushrooms or mushrooms into humans. Thus, another vase painting depicts Perseus contemplating the Gorgon's head reflected on the surface of a shield, which resembles the cap of a large mushroom, complete with a perfect indication of the gills on its underside growing through the [illegible] with its transmutation into the pruned olive tree. It is significant that the tool employed by Perseus is always a pruning hook. Perseus is wearing his

characteristic red spotted Phrygian cap, suggestive of his consubstantiality with the mushroom, while beside his cap is an additional annotation of its transmutation into the pruned olive tree, a detail otherwise totally without meaning.

> Two drops of Gorgon blood. One is lethal, the other brings relief for every ill.
>
> EURIPIDES ION 1003 SQ.

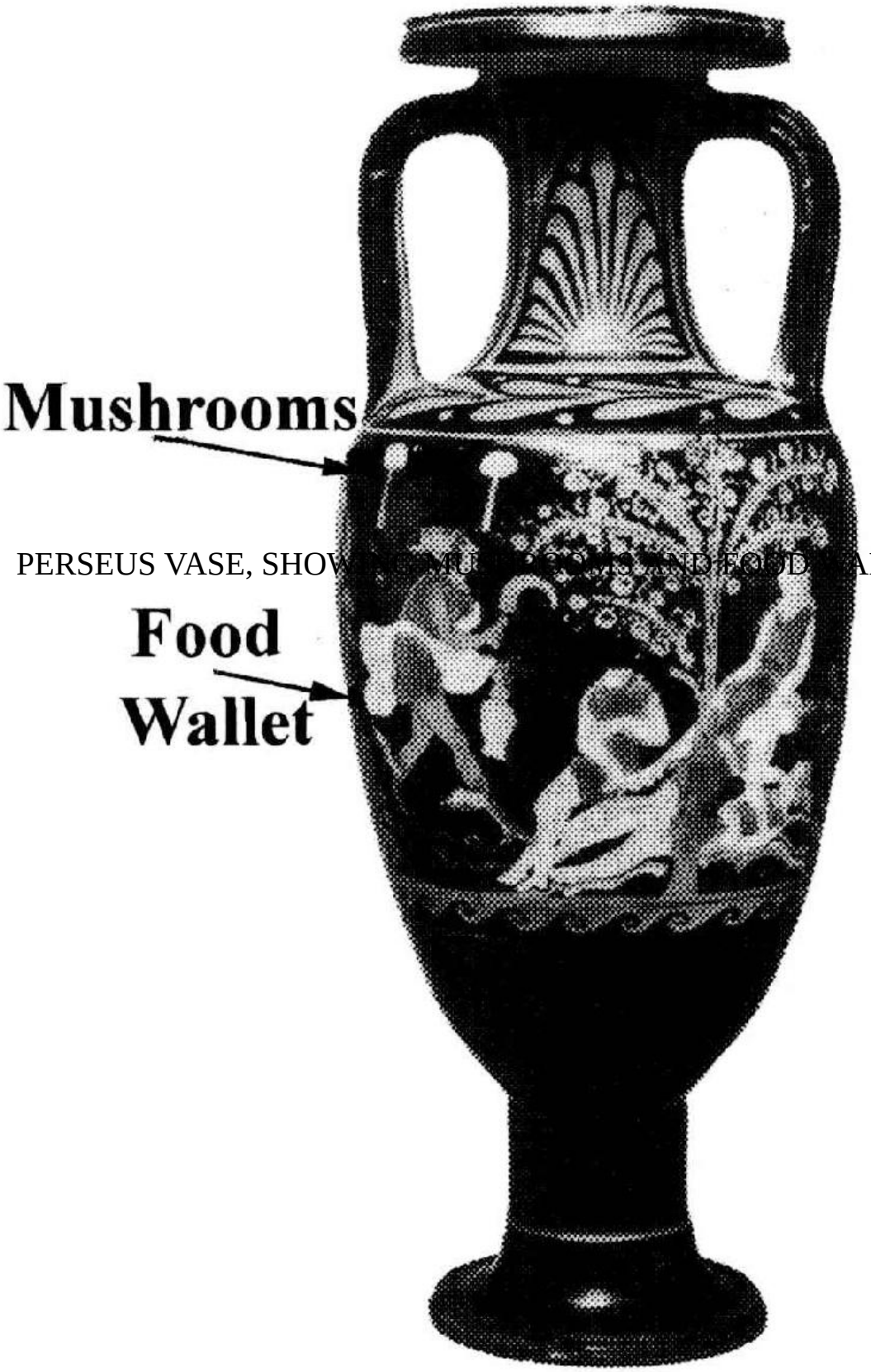
The Lovatelli Urn

THERE WAS A TRADITION that the hero Herakles was initiated into the Mysteries in preparation for his descent to fetch back Cerberus, the hound of Hades, which is to say, that the initiation afforded him access to the netherworld; it was his good fortune to arrive there just as the Eleusinian initiates were celebrating their orgy with the goddess, and thus he was able to resurface with them through the doorway in the Telesterion in the procession led by the jubilant cry personified by Iakchos. Accounts differ about who initiated him and under what circumstances, but the essential is that the rite let him descend to see Persephone and that he met up there with the procession of the others.

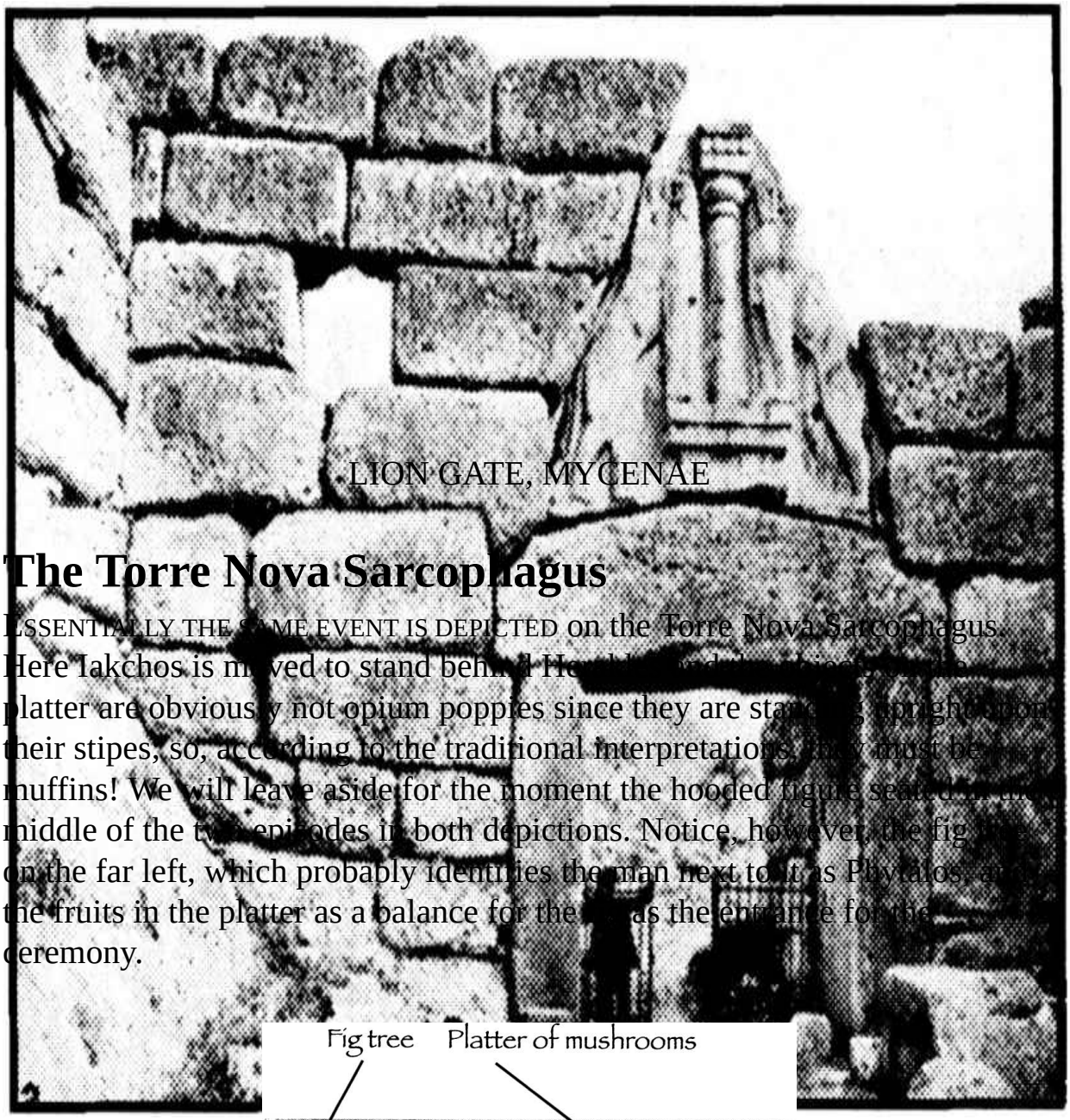


LOVATELLI URN, WITH CLOSE-UP OF PLATTER OF MUSHROOMS

This initiation is the subject depicted on the Lovatelli Urn, a Hellenistic marble cinerary urn so-named for the Countess E.C. Lovatelli, who first published it in 1879. On one side, the goddess Demeter is seen sitting on the Mystery Hamper or *Cista mystica*, with a serpent emerging and approaching the hand of a handsome youth who is probably the Iakchos figure. The name is a pun upon Bakchos or Bacchus-Dionysus, with whom he is commonly identified, and it designates him as a "drug-man," incorporating the same *ia*-root for "toxin" that appears in the word for doctor as *iatros* or a "drug-doer" and the homonymous words *ios* for "drug" and the poisoned "arrow" of the bow, which in Greek is called *toxon*, the origin of the English "toxin," as the poison shot with the venomous bow, resulting in "intoxication." As such, his role as the leader of the joyous procession into the sacred circle clearly indicates the ecstatic manner of the initiates' journey, as well as the means by which it was achieved. Behind Demeter is her daughter Persephone. On the other side of the urn, Herakles, identified by the lion skin he customarily wears, is sacrificing a pig, which was a required preliminary for the ritual. The pig was particularly dear to the goddess since like the bear it responds to the human sex pheromone. The Gorgon Medusa was portrayed with pig tusks, ears, and nose. A priest next to Herakles holds a platter of three large mushrooms, with rounded caps and thick stipes. Three is the traditional dosage; it is also appropriate for the trinity of the goddess. These have been usually interpreted as opium poppies, since opium does not elicit the mushroom phobias of traditional scholars, but there would be no reason to leave the stems on the poppy capsules and they are rather too thick to play that role. Nor is the characteristic calyx of the capsules indicated. They are, quite simply, mushrooms.



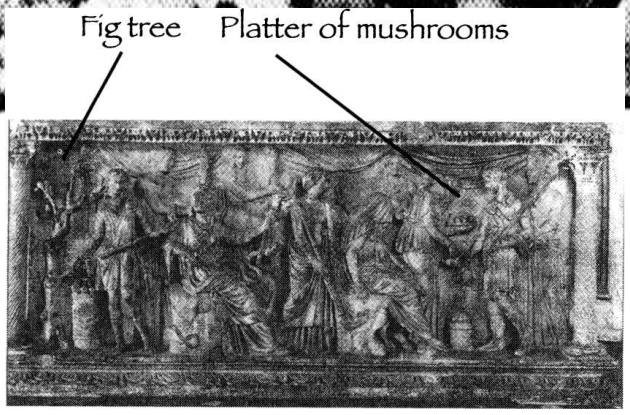
PERSEUS VASE, SHOWING MUSHROOMS AND FOOD WALLET.



LION GATE, MYCENAE

The Torre Nova Sarcophagus

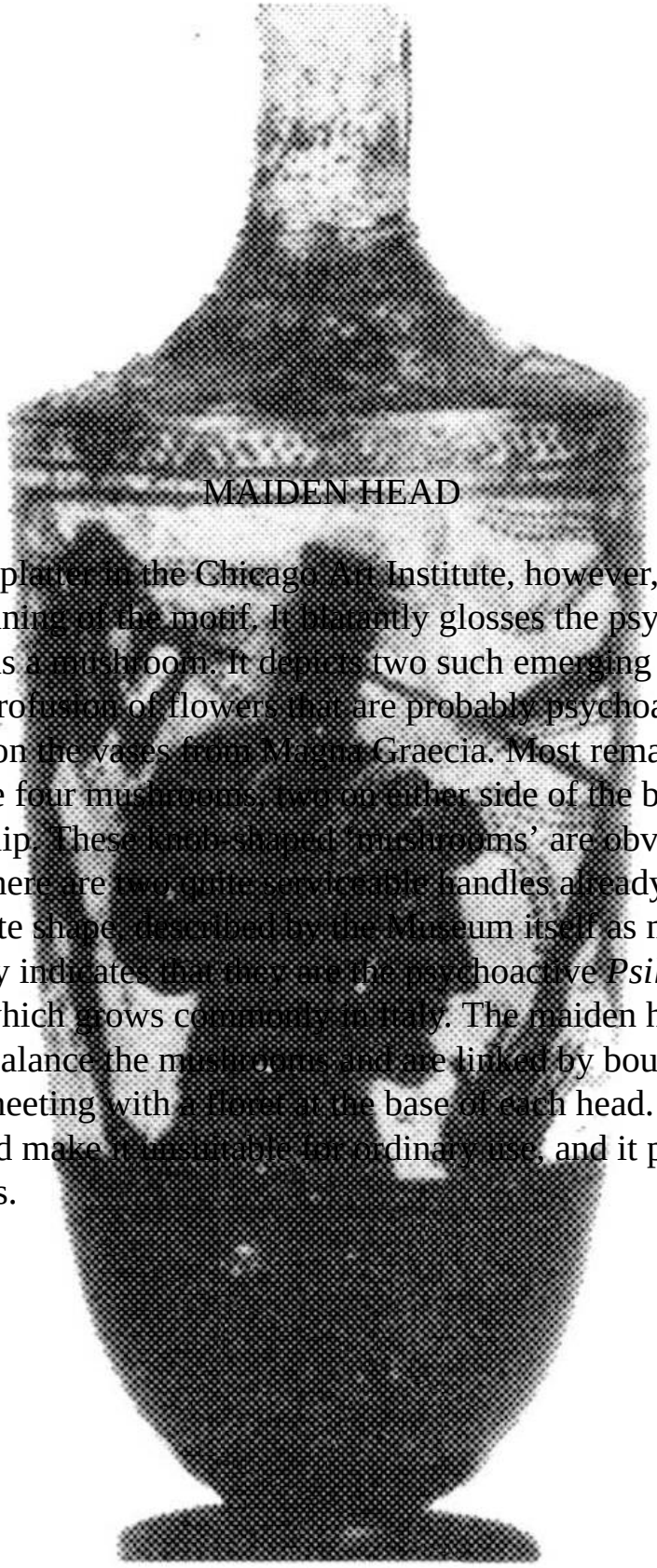
ESSENTIALLY THE SAME EVENT IS DEPICTED on the Torre Nova Sarcophagus. Here Iakchos is moved to stand behind He[illegible] platter are obviously not opium poppies since they are standing upright upon their stipes, so, according to the traditional interpretations, they must be muffins! We will leave aside for the moment the hooded figure seated in the middle of the two episodes in both depictions. Notice, however, the fig tree on the far left, which probably identifies the man next to it as Phytalos, and the fruits in the platter as a balance for the [illegible] as the entrance for the ceremony.



TORRE NOVA SARCOPHAGUS

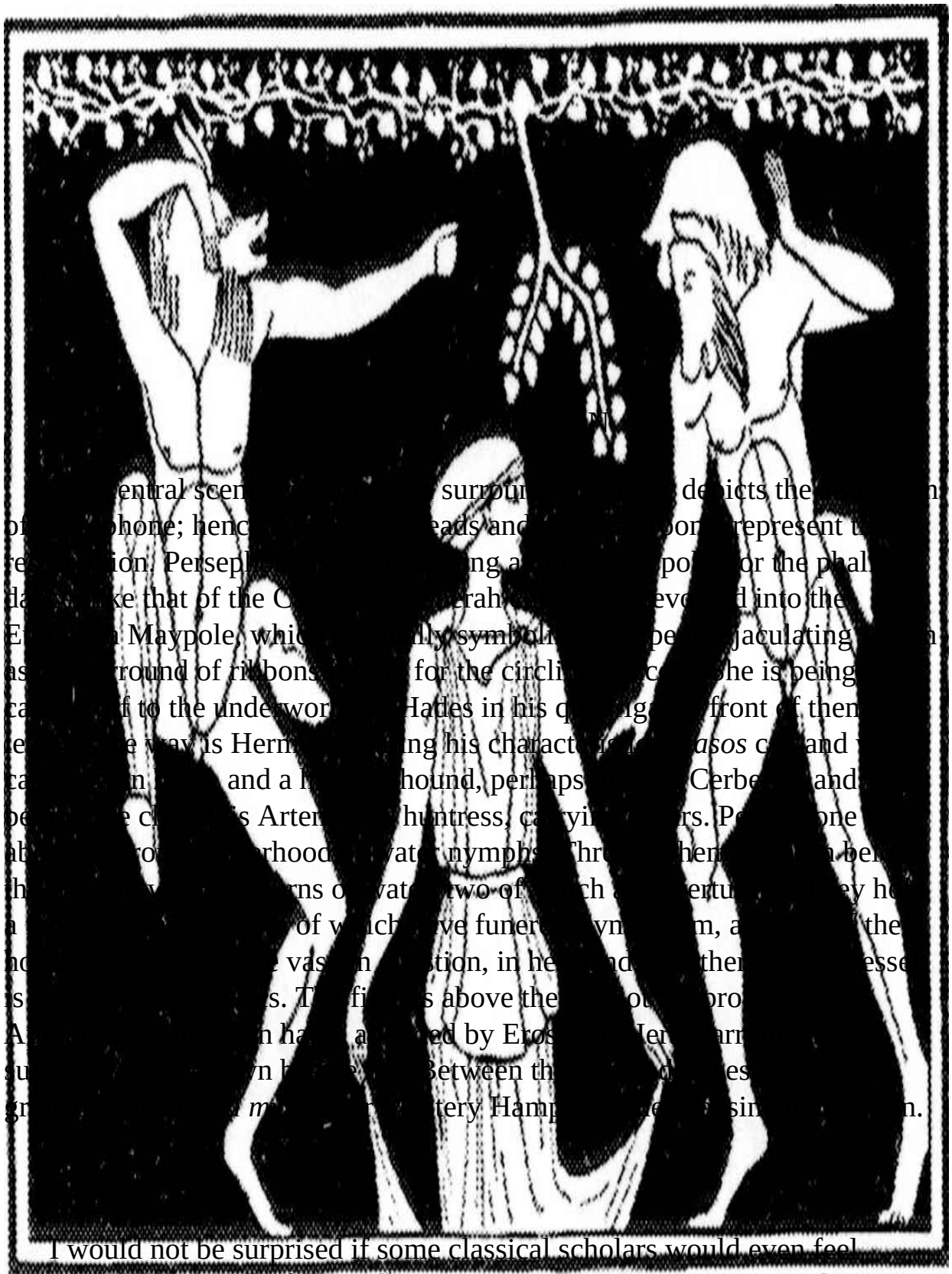
The Chicago Platter

EXPLICIT REVELATIONS OF THE FUNGAL EUCHARIST, as occurs on the Perseus vase or the Lovatelli Urn and Torre Nova Sarcophagus, are particularly common from southern Italy, where vases, with obvious funerary symbolism, have survived by virtue of their having been placed in tombs and they testify probably to similar local cultic practices of the Eleusinian rite. Vases often depict Persephone’s return, usually in an ecstatic context, as just a head emerging from the ground, remarkably similar to a sprouting mushroom.



MAIDEN HEAD

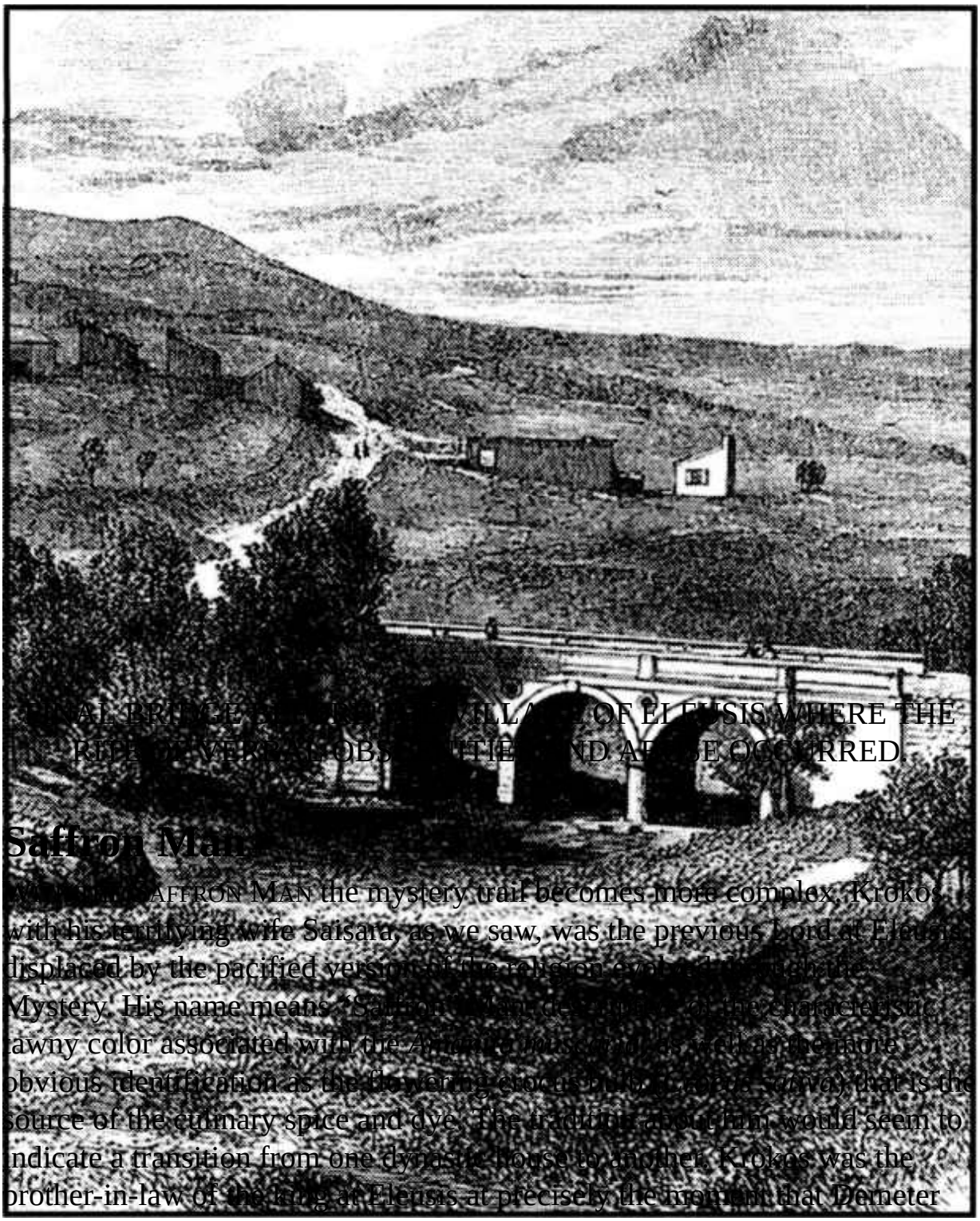
An Apulian platter in the Chicago Art Institute, however, is unique in proving the meaning of the motif. It blatantly glosses the psychoactive botanical head as a mushroom. It depicts two such emerging maiden heads, rising out of a profusion of flowers that are probably psychoactive Datura lilies, common on the vases from Magna Graecia. Most remarkable, however, are the four mushrooms, two on either side of the broad handles, on the platter's lip. These knob-shaped 'mushrooms' are obviously not handles, since there are two quite serviceable handles already, and the acutely umbonate shape, described by the Museum itself as mushroom shapes, probably indicates that they are the psychoactive *Psilocybe semilanceata*, which grows commonly in Italy. The maiden heads symmetrically balance the mushrooms and are linked by boughs of laurel along the rim, meeting with a floret at the base of each head. Its large size, moreover, would make it unsuitable for ordinary use, and it probably held funeral offerings.



I would not be surprised if some classical scholars would even feel that we are guilty of a sacrilegious outrage at now prying open the

secret.

R. GORDON WASSON



FINAL ERECTION OF THE VILLAGE OF ELEUSIS WHERE THE RITES OF VENERABLE OBSCURITY AND AWE OCCURRED.

Saffron Man

In SAFFRON MAN the mystery trail becomes more complex. Krokos with his terrifying wife Saisara, as we saw, was the previous Lord at Eleusis displaced by the pacified version of the religion evolved through the Mystery. His name means 'Saffron Man' and derives from the characteristic tawny color associated with the Armenian *crocus sativus* as well as the more obvious identification as the flowering crocus bulb (*crocus sativus*) that is the source of the culinary spice and dye. The tradition about him would seem to indicate a transition from one dynastic house to another. Krokos was the brother-in-law of the king at Eleusis at precisely the moment that Demeter instituted the new Mystery; hence the families are related on the female side. His wife's sister Metanaira and her husband Celeus were the parents of the magical child Demophoön, who was founder of one the four hereditary lineages for the priesthood of the new religion. The family relationship and

shift in leadership, via the female connection, would seem to indicate a transition in the evolution of the religion

In commemoration of this former Saffron Lord, the initiates each received a woolen wristband and another for the ankle as they crossed the brackish waters of the lake that marked the boundary of the Eleusinian territory. The bands were dyed with saffron and tied by priests who claimed direct linear descent from Krokos. Such tied bands signified a union accomplished over a frontier, similar to the significance today of the yellow ribbons that remember troops or hostages held in foreign lands. By wearing these saffron bands, the initiates signified that they had experienced some preliminary preparation associated with the Krokos of the earlier rite, and that they had crossed the frontier for the new revelation.

The narrow bridge still today can be seen, now submerged in the brackish waters of the shallow lake. The procession of pilgrims symbolically passed the frontier between worlds, a momentous journey characterized by its difficulty, for the bridge was expressly constructed too narrow for vehicular traffic and ahead, just as they arrived at the village itself, it was traditional that they would be obscenely insulted by masked men, who lined the bridge across the final boundary of water.

> You came to me, sparkling gold in your hair, as I was plucking saffron petals into the lap of my dress, to flower there shining with the same gold as you. Grabbing my white wrists, you dragged me into the cave and took of me your shameless pleasure.
>
> EURIPIDES ION, 887 SQ.

The crocus flower and its dye marked a person as someone who had died in the service of the old Minoan goddess; these figures who attended her were often symbolized as having lost their sexuality in her service, and hence the saffron color suggested effeminacy, often involving a hermaphroditic persona or homoeroticism with a male deity. A Minoan fresco from the island of Thera depicts women, dressed in yellow and

reddish orange, harvesting the saffron stigmas and presenting them to a goddess. The chamber with the fresco was involved in cultic rites surrounding puberty, menstruation, and childbirth. The red stigmas, which are the female organ, amidst the yellow petals, represented the blood of the Goddess's menstrual flux, and the stamens, which are the male organs, are ineffective, rendering the plant, like the male consort, sterile and seedless. In accepting the tied ribbons of saffron hue the initiates after they crossed the lake indicated that they, too, were willing to offer themselves up to their Mistress.

> Someone has called mycology the step-child of the sciences. Is it not now acquiring a wholly new and unexpected dimension? Religion has always been at the core of man's highest faculties and cultural achievements, and therefore I ask you now to contemplate our lowly mushroom—what patents of ancient lineage and nobility are coming its way!
>
> R. GORDON WASSON

But the Saffron Man of Eleusis was not the only manifestation of this tawny botanical figure. There was one who was a Spartan and the lover of Hermes, accidentally killed by him. He is similar to other bulbous Spartan flowers who suffered the same fate, like Hyacinth (botanically *Delphinium ajacis*), and they were originally human victims offered to the Goddess. Always from their spilled blood, the flower was said to first have sprouted, in the case of the hyacinth, even bearing the supposed lamentation for their death in the design of its petals.

As Crocus he was the lover of Smilax, the two metamorphosed, according to Ovid, into flowers. His coupling with Smilax suggests his psychoactive nature since the latter was one of the plants analogous to the vine and sacred to Dionysus. It is possible, that the combination of smilax with the culinary saffron, as in the marriage of the two lovers metamorphosed into flowers, is a coded pharmaceutical means for accessing

a psychoactive potion, combining enabling tryptamines of the acacia-smilax with psychoactive betacarboline alkaloids of the saffron, similar to the joining of *Banisteriopsis caapi* and *Psychotria viridis* in the preparation of *ayahuasca.* In any case, the culinary saffron is reportedly psychoactive in large enough amounts, similar to the properties of nutmeg. And the tradition of the crocus as consubstantial with a possessing deity is indicated by the shamanic encounter of the Athenian Queen Kreousa with Apollo as she was gathering saffron flowers.

The autumn crocus (*Colchicum macrophyllum, autumnale*), first flowered from the drops of *ichor,* the divine fluid that was the blood of the gods, shed by the tormented Prometheus, who was responsible for implanting the fire of celestial Intelligence in the creatures of mankind that he created out of the clay of Earth. This crocus is the one identified as the Promethean herb that Medea employed for the magical ointment with which she anointed the hero Jason. This crocus, however, over a half-foot high, was merely a disguise for another plant, since this blood-like divine fluid of Prometheus turned into “stones” when it fell to the ground, and Prometheus, after the liberation from his torment, wore a “ring,” the first ever fashioned, set with one of these magical stones: the gemstone and the ring suggest that the myth masks the fungal identity of the actual plant, which significantly was parasitic upon an oak or beech tree, both common hosts for the mushroom.

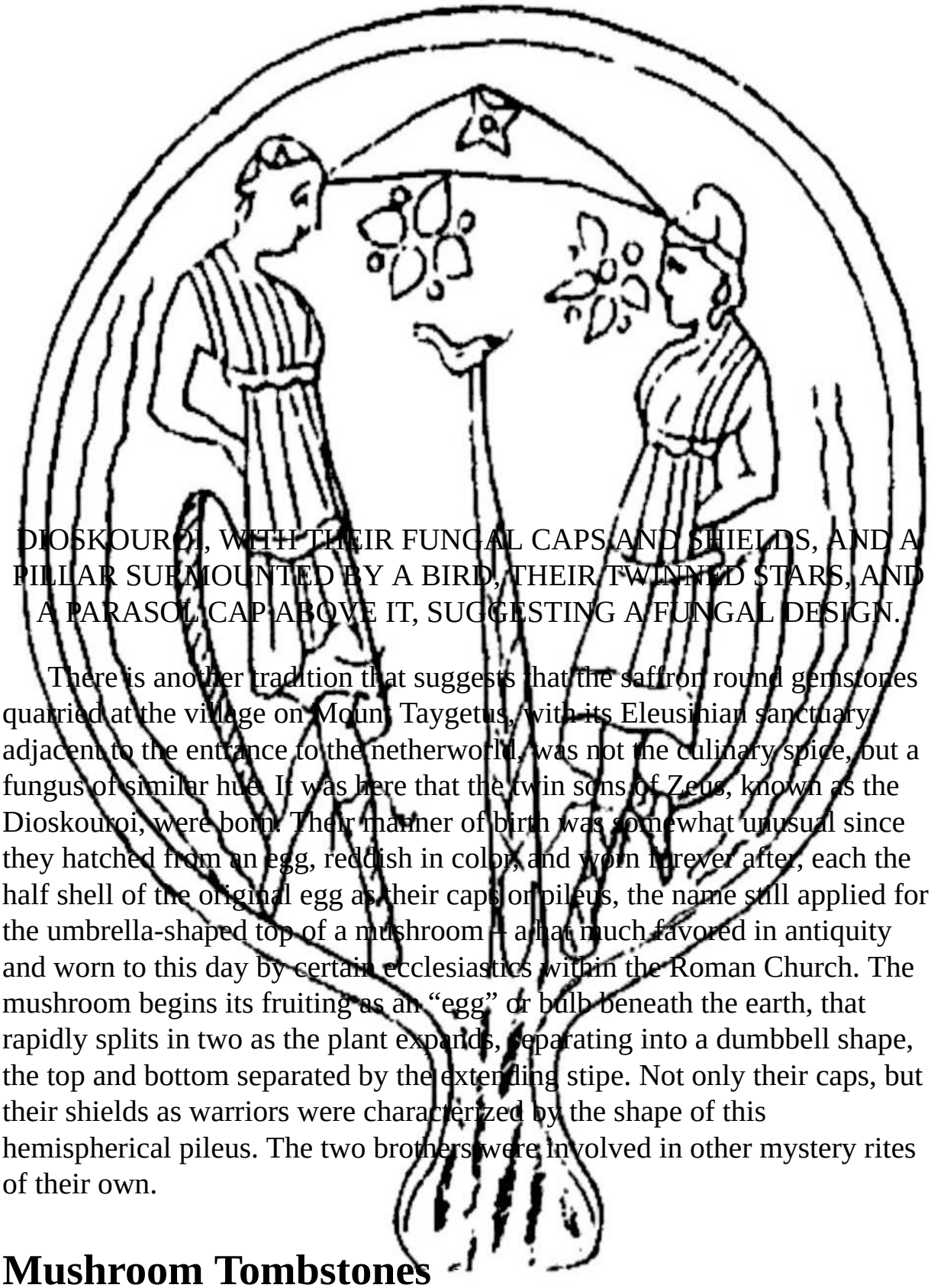
A village in Laconia bore the name of Krokeas (Croceas), although it was not noted for its cultivation of the crocus, but for its quarries, from which was extracted gems similar to rounded river-stones that were difficult to work but made good ornamentation for sacred places and for watering locales like baths and aqueducts. This is obviously a garbled account that indicates the sanctity of the so-called stones in aquatic immersion, especially since rounded stones are not extracted from quarries nor did such a quarry ever exist.

Instead Krokeas, probably named for the fertility daemon Krokos, was located on the forested southern slopes of Mount Taygetus above the town of Sparta, close to the entrance to the netherworld that Herakles employed for his descent after his preliminary Eleusinian initiation, and it was the site of one of the regional or local sanctuaries of Demeter bearing the epithet of Eleusinia. It was a perfect habitat for the growth of mushrooms.

> It would be easier to accept these as phalloi if any one of them bore the slightest resemblance to the organ with which Greek artists were well familiar. The only group of objects which all these phalloi can be said to resemble is fungi mushrooms and toadstools. The asymmetry of the glans, the duct, and the testicles are never shown, and the knob is often flat or spherical.
>
> DONNA KURTZ AND J. BOARDMAN GREEK BURIAL CUSTOMS

Zeus had slept with one of the Pleiades and she gave birth to a son called Lacedaimon, the eponymous hero of Sparta and the Peloponnesus; her name was Taygeta and she hid herself on the mountain that received her name. Artemis turned her into a hind with golden horns. The quest for the golden horn of this Cerynean Hind was one of Herakles' Labors. No female deer bears antlers except for the reindeer, which is not native to Greece, but it is found far to the north in the homeland of the Indo-European immigrants, which they recalled as the land of the Hyperboreans, living beyond the north wind Boreas. The reindeer is notorious for its love of the *Amanita muscaria* and its metabolite in urine because of the intoxication it induces that affects them as well as humans. The association of the mushroom and the reindeer is probably the reason that the Koryak shamans dress in deerskins and antlers.

An animal with a tree-like antlered configuration has an obvious botanical persona; and when Herakles finally tracked her down in the far north, he harvested the golden horn. As he brought it back to this world, for the Hyperboreans were of the otherworld, like the Isle of Avalon, the horn metamorphosed, as is likely to happen as one crosses the frontier from dream to reality: it turned into the olive tree, like the metamorphosis of the Gorgon head into the same plant, and Herakles planted it as the origin of the sacred grove of Zeus at the sanctuary of Olympia.

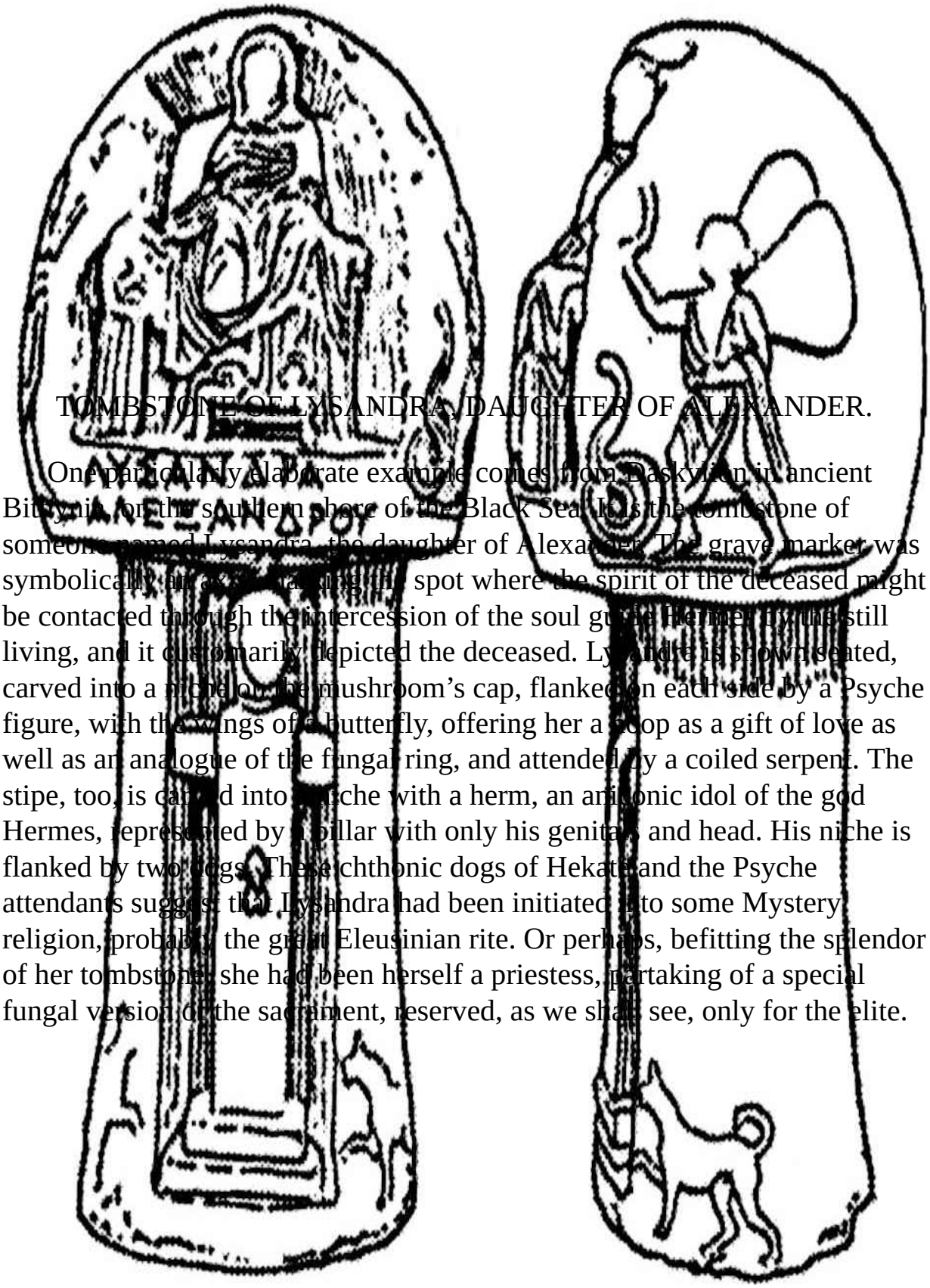


DIOSKOUROI, WITH THEIR FUNGAL CAPS AND SHIELDS, AND A PILLAR SURMOUNTED BY A BIRD, THEIR TWINNED STARS, AND A PARASOL CAP ABOVE IT, SUGGESTING A FUNGAL DESIGN.

There is another tradition that suggests that the saffron round gemstones quarried at the village on Mount Taygetus, with its Eleusinian sanctuary adjacent to the entrance to the netherworld, was not the culinary spice, but a fungus of similar hue. It was here that the twin sons of Zeus, known as the Dioskouroi, were born. Their manner of birth was somewhat unusual since they hatched from an egg, reddish in color, and worn forever after, each the half shell of the original egg as their caps or pileus, the name still applied for the umbrella-shaped top of a mushroom – a hat much favored in antiquity and worn to this day by certain ecclesiastics within the Roman Church. The mushroom begins its fruiting as an "egg" or bulb beneath the earth, that rapidly splits in two as the plant expands, separating into a dumbbell shape, the top and bottom separated by the extending stipe. Not only their caps, but their shields as warriors were characterized by the shape of this hemispherical pileus. The two brothers were involved in other mystery rites of their own.

Mushroom Tombstones

SYMBOLISM OF THE MUSHROOM as a sacred mediator with the otherworld is further demonstrated by the existence of numerous grave markers and stone finials on tumuli in the shape of mushrooms.



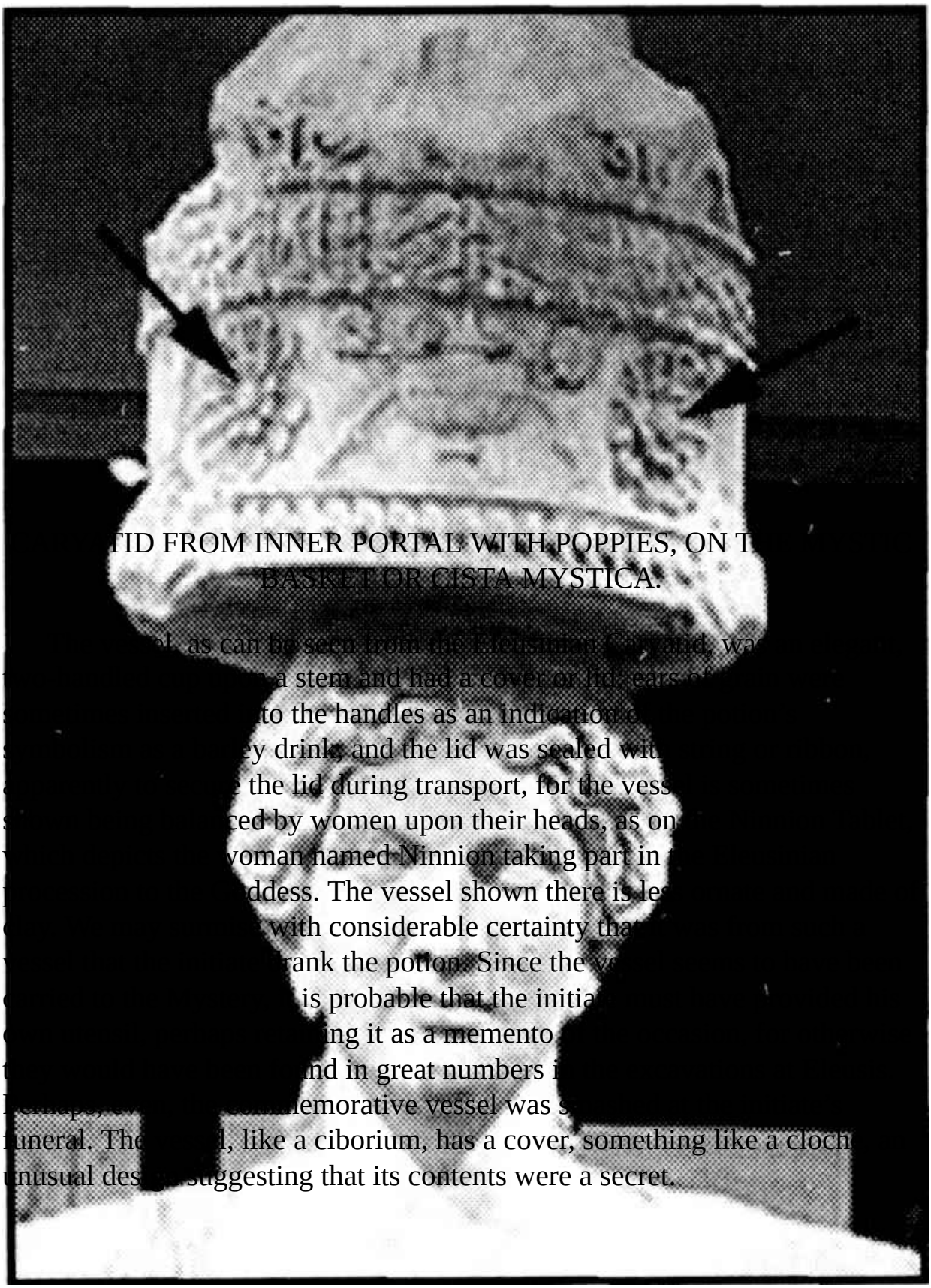
TOMBSTONE OF LYSANDRA, DAUGHTER OF ALEXANDER.

One particularly elaborate example comes from Paskyleion in ancient Bithynia on the southern shore of the Black Sea. It is the tombstone of someone named Lysandra, the daughter of Alexander. The grave marker was symbolically an axis mundi, marking the spot where the spirit of the deceased might be contacted through the intercession of the soul guide Hermes by the still living, and it customarily depicted the deceased. Lysandra is shown seated, carved into a niche on the mushroom's cap, flanked on each side by a Psyche figure, with the wings of a butterfly, offering her a scoop as a gift of love as well as an analogue of the fungal ring, and attended by a coiled serpent. The stipe, too, is carved into a niche with a herm, an aniconic idol of the god Hermes, represented by a pillar with only his genitals and head. His niche is flanked by two dogs. These chthonic dogs of Hekate and the Psyche attendants suggest that Lysandra had been initiated into some Mystery religion, probably the great Eleusinian rite. Or perhaps, befitting the splendor of her tombstone, she had been herself a priestess, partaking of a special fungal version of the sacrament, reserved, as we shall see, only for the elite.

5

Within the Mystery Hall

AN INTERLUDE: there is an etiquette to table manners, albeit sacred. How the potion was served provides an additional clue to the puzzle. A special vessel was associated with the drinking of the *kykeon.* Unfortunately the name of that vessel is not recorded in the *Hymn to Demeter* since a lacuna of some 22 to 26 lines, caused by a flaw in the original manuscript occurs just at the moment that Demeter receives the potion. In an Orphic Hymn, where Baubo served the *kykeon* instead of lambe, the vessel is named as an *angos*, generically a “vessell” or “bowl,” perhaps not specific for this ceremony, to which is added an epithet that might suggest that it was made of metal. Several such vessels occur in Eleusinian decorations, where they appear to serve as the very emblem of the Mystery.



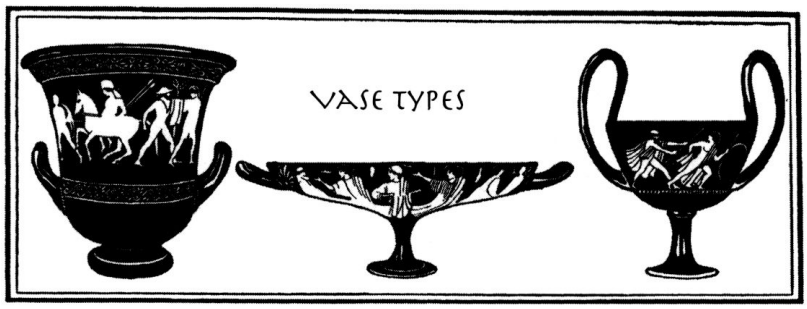
TID FROM INNER PORTAL WITH POPPIES, ON T
BASKET OR CISTA MYSTICA.

el, as can be seen from the Eleusinian [illegible], wa
a stem and had a cover or lid; ears of
to the handles as an indication o
ey drink, and the lid was sealed wit
the lid during transport, for the vess
ced by women upon their heads, as on
voman named Ninnion taking part in
ddess. The vessel shown there is les
with considerable certainty tha
rank the potion. Since the ve
is probable that the initia
ing it as a memento
nd in great numbers i
emorative vessel was s
uneral. The lid, like a ciborium, has a cover, something like a cloch
unusual des suggesting that its contents were a secret.

KERNOS VESSEL

Hernos, the Monstrance

THE MIXING OF THE POTION was part of the ceremony performed after the initiates had entered the initiation hall. There, another vessel, the *kernos*, was involved; its shape and symbolism help us recapture the meaning of the ritual and the potion. Its name appears to derive from pre-Greek times and it was used in the worship of the Great Goddess Rhea, who was the mother of Zeus. The *kerchnos* was probably the same vessel, named from the manner of its manufacture by "roughening" or embossing metal. The meaning of the *kernos* in its original language was quite simple: "seeds of grain." And it could be rather magnificent, since we find mention of golden exemplars in the records of the treasure stored in the local Eleusinion at Athens. Several less precious versions have been found at Eleusis. These *kernos* vessels consist of a central bowl surrounded by many unmovably attached smaller cups that were supposed to contain an array of plant and animal produce (or more precisely, by one account: sage, white poppy-seeds, grains of wheat and barley, peas, vetches, okra seeds, lentils, beans, rice, oats, dried fruit, honey, oil, wine, milk, eggs, and natural wool).



These contents, however, must have had only a symbolic meaning with regard to the substance contained in the central bowl, for some extant versions of the *kernos* have the peripheral cups reduced to a mere swirling design, incapable of holding anything. It was the contents of the central bowl that was important, and the *kernos* presented that substance as some kind of sacred culmination to the edible foodstuffs of the plant and animal worlds. The shape of the *kernos*, moreover, makes it ungainly as a drinking vessel, and it was apparently the monstrance, as in the Roman Mass, meant to display the Eucharistic Host.

Its shape derives from still earlier exemplars where there is just the annular ring with animals feeding at the cups. Large stone exemplars from Crete, moreover, like millstones, were too heavy to lift. These versions were apparently Offertories.

Mixing Craters

DURING THE INITIATION, the hierophant removed the monstrances from the shrine, the *Anaktoron* that was the antique House of the Goddess, like the Tabernacle containing the sacred Eucharist of the Roman Catholic Mass. There obviously was no bonfire burning within it! He conveyed the vessels to the monstrance-bearers, the so-called “kernos-bearers.” These were the priestesses who danced with the vessels balanced upon their heads. Apparently, there were oil lamps lighted in some of the peripheral cups, at least in those cases where the *kernos* is suitably constructed. Or at least some of the priestess danced balancing lamps upon their heads. The pageantry of the dancing priestesses in the darkened Hall displaying the monstrances must have been extraordinarily moving.

These women then presided over the actual mixing of the *kykeon* in vessels called craters (*krateres*), which in Greek means simply cauldrons or “mixing bowls.” They are sometimes also referred to as *kernoi,* but obviously merely symbolically, for the *kernos* would be totally unsuited for the preparation of the great quantity of potion that would be required to fill the many *angos* vessels from which the initiates then drank the *kykeon.*

SKYPHOS

KYLIX

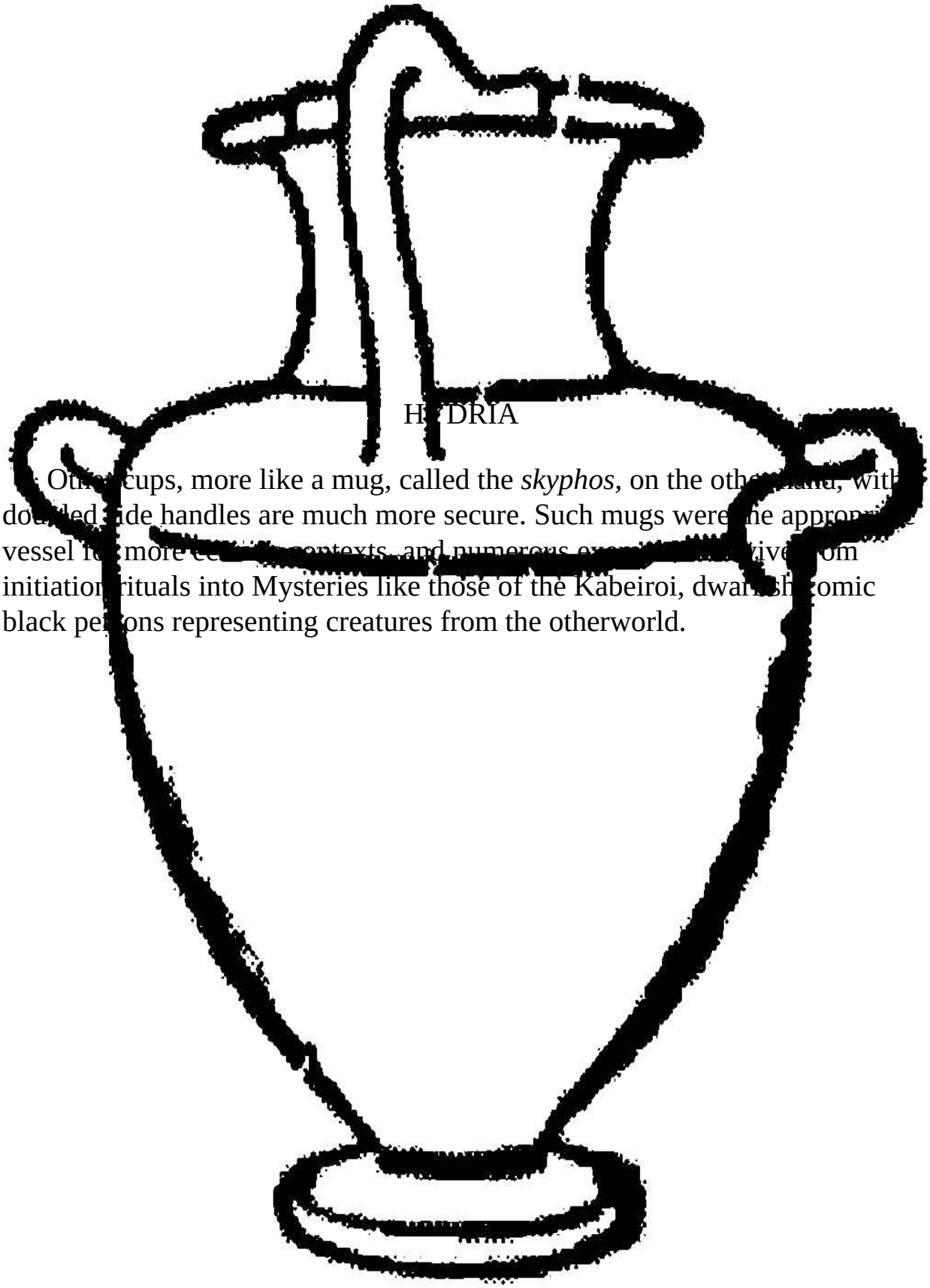
> Next, the hierophant performs the initiation and he takes the Holiness from the antique House and distributes it to all the ones who will carry the kernos around in the dancing. . . Then, raising his own kernos aloft like the person who bears the winnowing-shovel, he tastes the Holiness.
>
> POLEMON ON THE SACRED FLEECE OF ZEUS

The intoxicating nature of that drink is indicated by the fact that some kind of *krater* was employed since it was ordinarily used for the ceremonial mixing of wine. But these craters contained no wine, since it was a drink that was explicitly prohibited at Eleusis. It would, however, be the expectable term to describe the utensil for mixing other drinks also, especially if the drink like wine was an inebriant. It should be obvious, moreover, that no

time was afforded for the mixture to ferment; it was not beer nor did it derive its inebriating propertie: from alcohol.

Wine Cups and Mugs

THE DESIGN OF THE DRINKING VESSELS indicates the degree of intoxication that was socially acceptable. At the male drinking parties called symposiums, although extreme drunkenness, as we shall see, was often induced, it would be a failure of manners to appear intoxicated. Hence the drinking vessel called the *kylix* was a broad shallow platter supported upon a slender stem, like the wine glass of today, although it has a deeper cup. Inebriation would make it awkward to manipulate, but spilling the drink would be a sign of boorishness.



HYDRIA

Other cups, more like a mug, called the *skyphos*, on the other hand, with doubled side handles are much more secure. Such mugs were the appropriate vessel for more ecstatic contexts, and numerous examples survive from initiation rituals into Mysteries like those of the Kabeiroi, dwarfish comic black persons representing creatures from the otherworld.

PAPAVER SOMNIFERUM

ROSETTE - DETAIL, MYSTIC HAMPER

CISTUS CYPRIUS

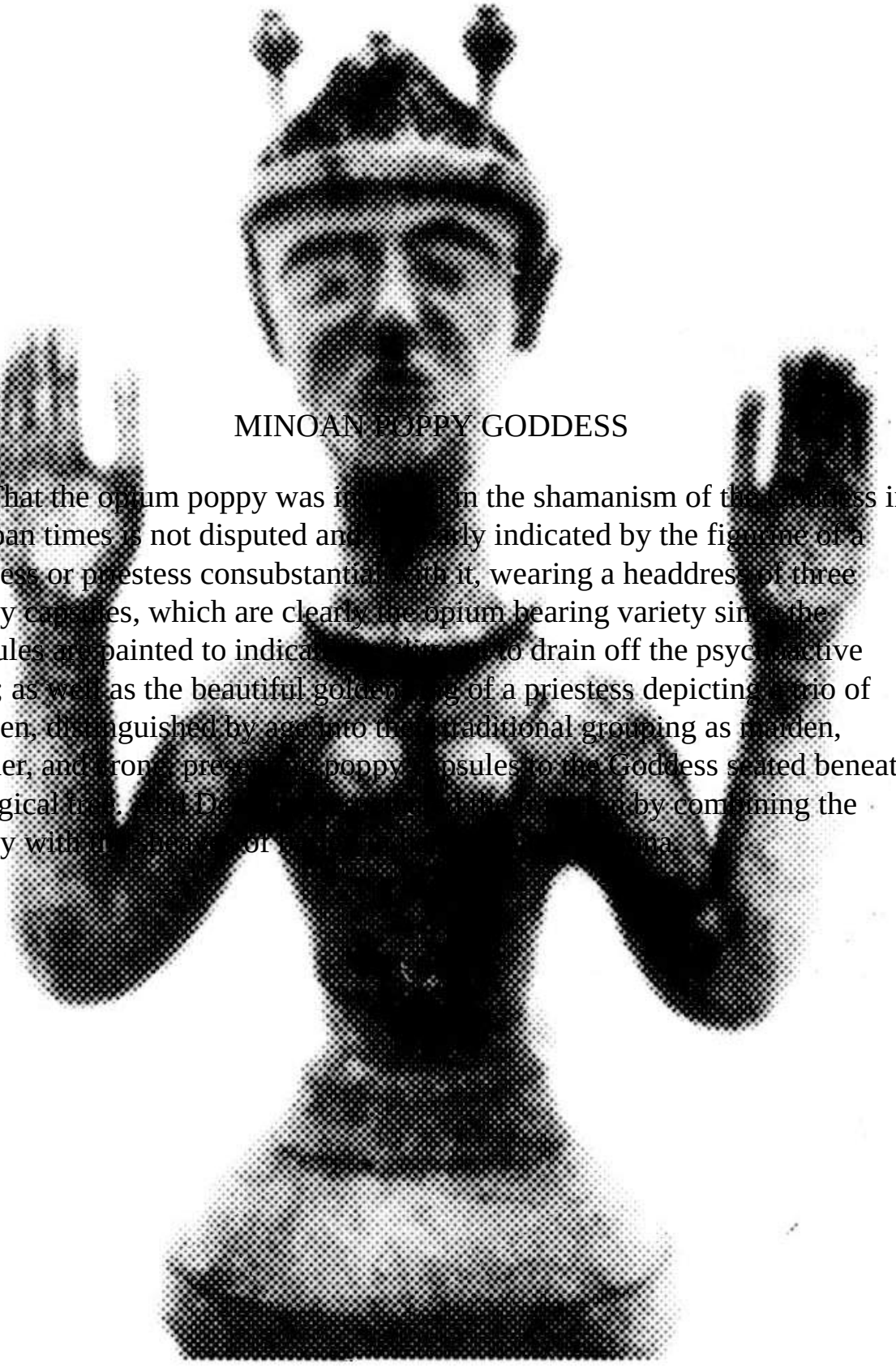
The god Dionysus's own choice of drinking vessel was the "beetle" or *kantharos*, similarly two handled, but of elegant design, on a stable stem, so called from the resemblance of its handles to the wings of the scarab beetle.

Cista mystica, the Mystic Hamper

THE WATER FOR THE MIXING CEREMONY would have been poured from the appropriate utensil, a *hydria* or water pitcher. The other ingredients were hidden within the Mystic Hampers, the *Cista mystica* baskets. Two priestesses as the caryatids of the Inner Portal bear them confidently upon their heads into the sacrosanct forbidden enclosure toward the Telesterion for the mixing ceremony. Each hamper is marked with the ornate *kykeon* vessel as an indication that it encloses the ingredients for the potion, explicitly designated by the stalk of barley intertwined with its handles and the florets of the tuft-like mint blossom of pennyroyal, or botanically *Mentha pulegium*, also called fleabane, the *glechon* of the Homeric formula. The formula clearly enunciated in the Homeric Hymn should have made these botanic identifications long ago incontrovertible. It should also be obvious that the hampers are not capacious enough to contain mushrooms of the ordinary kind in large enough amounts to satisfy the needs of thousands of initiates.

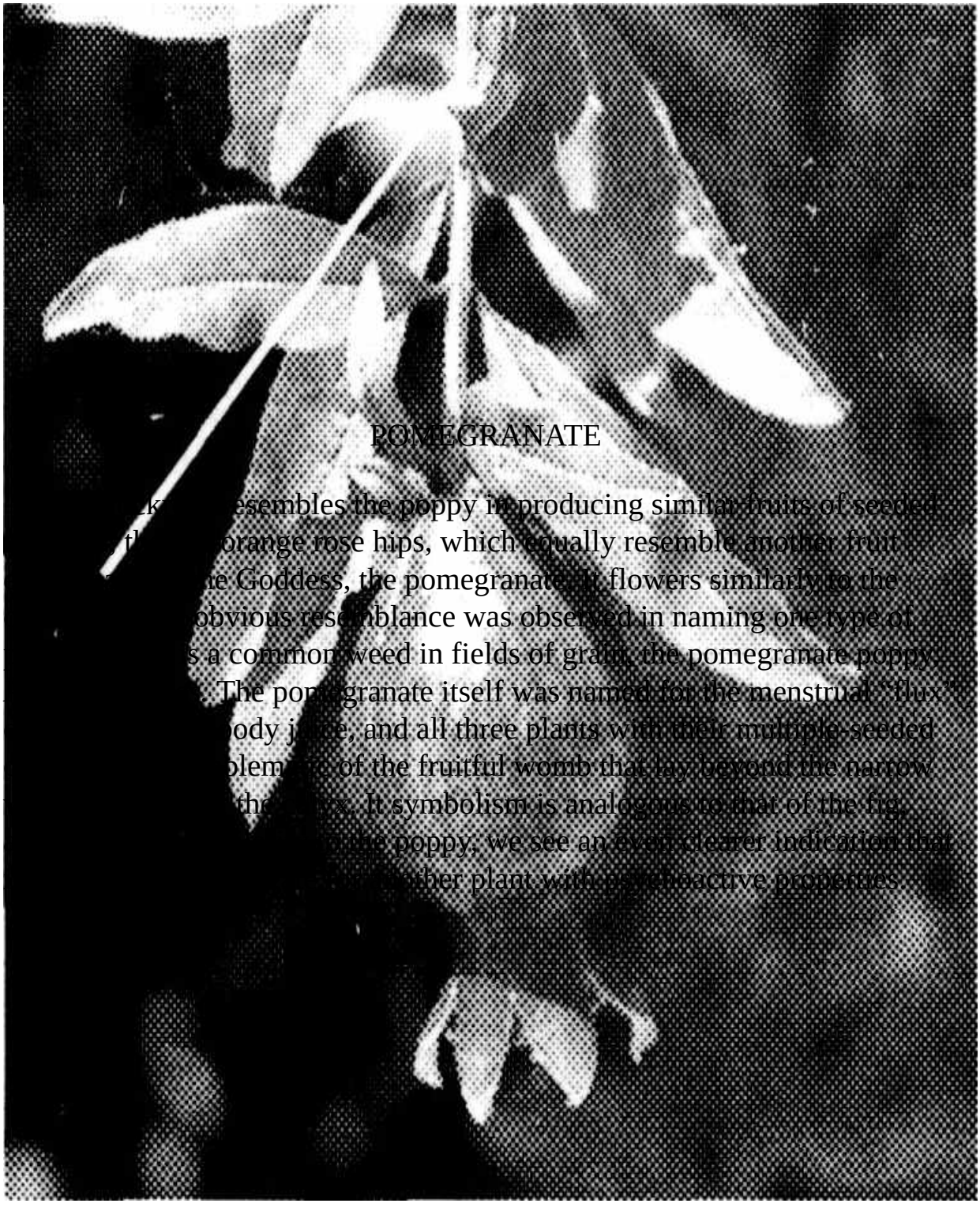
SECRETS OF PENNYROYAL

There is an additional ornamentation on either side of the covered ciborium Hamper, a large stylized floret of a different kind. It is a double rosette, and it figures elsewhere in the sculptural decoration of the sanctuary as emblematic of the Mystic Hamper, placed between a sheaf of barley and the Mystic Hamper. The *Cista mystica* in Greek is *Kiste*, so named from the *kistos* or rock rose shrub (*Cistus cyprius*), from which the fragrant gum-labdanum resin is extracted, originally scraped from the beards of the goats that graze on it; in Greek the resin is called *ladanon*, a word assimilated from the Semitic, where it is the name of this plant. The rose is like the common beach rose or wild rose, with a single row of five petals. But the rosette of the Hamper, in addition to being a stylized exaggeration with its doubled row, differs; there are ten petals within a second row of twelve, even numbers instead of the odd five of the rock rose, or its odd-numbered multiples. The even number is characteristic of the flower that it resembles, the four petaled blossom of the opium poppy, *Papaver somniferum*.



MINOAN POPPY GODDESS

That the opium poppy was important in the shamanism of the Goddess in Minoan times is not disputed and clearly indicated by the figurine of a goddess or priestess consubstantiated with it, wearing a headdress of three poppy capsules, which are clearly the opium bearing variety since the capsules are painted to indicate incisions to drain off the psychoactive milk; as well as the beautiful golden ring of a priestess depicting a trio of women, distinguished by age into the traditional grouping as maiden, mother, and crone, presenting poppy capsules to the Goddess seated beneath a magical tree. [illegible] by combining the poppy with [illegible] or [illegible].

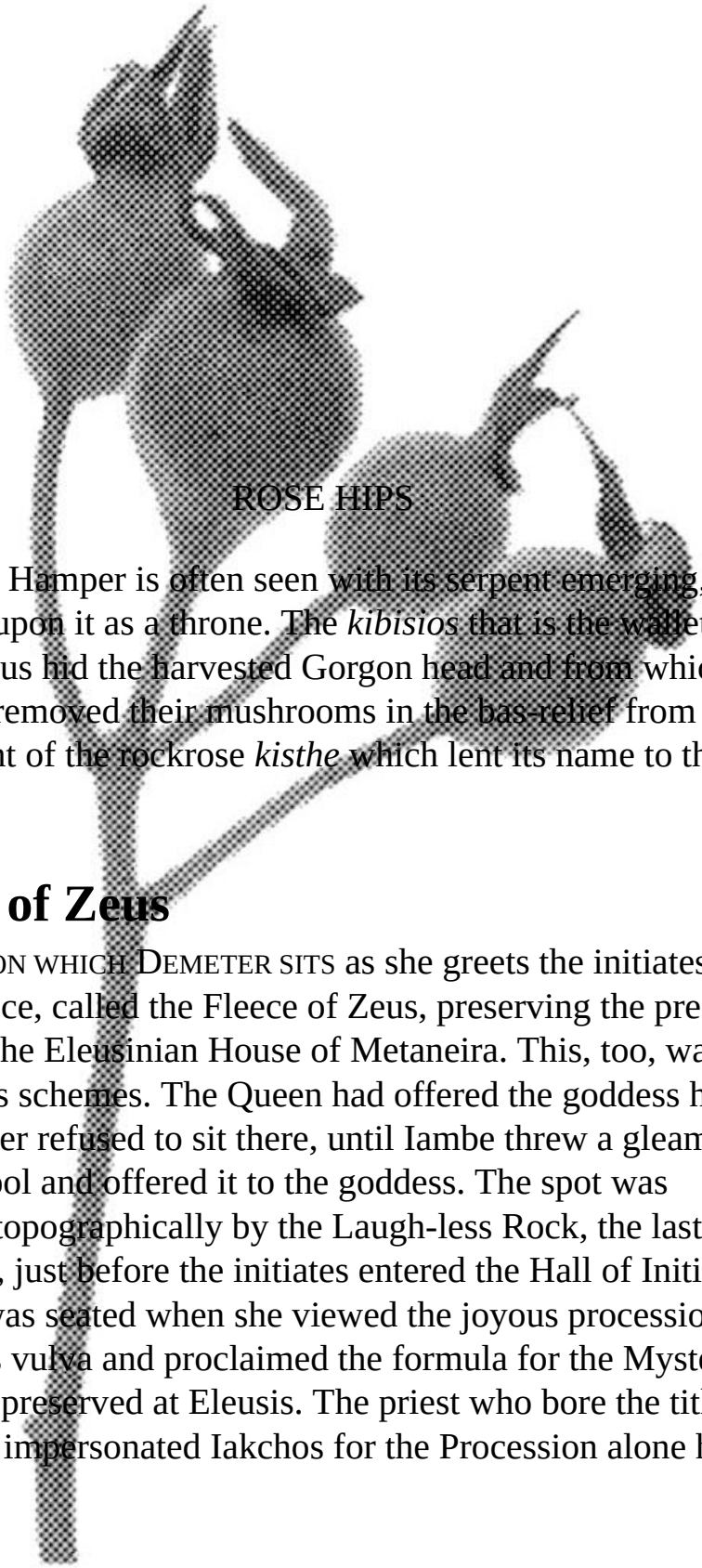


POMEGRANATE

esembles the poppy in producing similar fruits of seeded
orange rose hips, which equally resemble another fruit
e Goddess, the pomegranate. It flowers similarly to the
obvious resemblance was observed in naming one type of
s a common weed in fields of grain, the pomegranate poppy.
. The pomegranate itself was named for the menstrual "flux,"
ody j e, and all three plants with their multiple-seeded
blem of the fruitful womb that lay beyond the narrow
the x. It symbolism is analogous to that of the fig,
e poppy, we see an even clearer indication that
ther plant with psychoactive properties.

MINOAN RING: THREE AGES OF FEMALES PRESENTING FLOWERS TO THE GODDESS, HOLDING A TRIO OF POPPY CAPSULES, BENEATH THE SACRED TREE

The rockrose–poppy–pomegranate is the botanical original of the hidden *Cista mystica* hamper of the Mystery. In mythological traditions, it hid from profane sight the harvested Gorgon head, since the Gorgons themselves [illegible] a place called the "Gorgonian plains of Rockrose"; or it hid [illegible] "Apple" plucked as the Gorgon head by Perseus the Mushroom [illegible] garden of the Hesperides, where it was guarded by the serpent [illegible] "Rockrose," who was a brother of the Gorgon sisterhood. It also hid the botanical magical child, identified either as the serpent foster-son of Athena, Erichthonios, or his descendant, Ion, the saffron-begotten son of the Athenian Queen Kreousa. This latter, whose true name identified him botanically as the "violet" or "viola-pansy" was enclosed in just such a Hamper, with two tokens of his true identity, a piece of tapestry depicting the Gorgon head and golden serpent guardians.



ROSE HIPS

The Mystery Hamper is often seen with its serpent emerging, or with the Goddess seated upon it as a throne. The *kibisios* that is the wallet food pouch into which Perseus hid the harvested Gorgon head and from which the two goddesses have removed their mushrooms in the bas-relief from Pharsalos is a dialectal variant of the rockrose *kisthe* which lent its name to the *Cista mystica.*

The Fleece of Zeus

THE HAMPER UPON WHICH DEMETER SITS as she greets the initiates is draped with a ram's fleece, called the Fleece of Zeus, preserving the precedent of her first visit to the Eleusinian House of Metaneira. This, too, was one of the dwarfish Iambe's schemes. The Queen had offered the goddess her own chair, but Demeter refused to sit there, until Iambe threw a gleaming ram's fleece upon a stool and offered it to the goddess. The spot was commemorated topographically by the Laugh-less Rock, the last marker on the Sacred Road, just before the initiates entered the Hall of Initiation. This was where she was seated when she viewed the joyous procession emerging from the dwarf's vulva and proclaimed the formula for the Mystery drink. This Fleece was preserved at Eleusis. The priest who bore the title of Torchbearer and impersonated Iakchos for the Procession alone had license to touch it.

She rose and begged the goddess to be seated on her own chair, but Demeter, the goddess who brings forth the seasons and gives us splendid gifts, did not choose to be seated on the glittering chair; rather, she stood in silence with her beautiful eyes cast down, until the scheming lambe gave her a stool and threw a gleaming ram's fleece over it. Sitting there, she drew her veil *across* her face and for a long time sat grieving, speechless as she sat upon the stool.

HOMERIC HYMN TO DEMETER VERSES 191 SQ.

The Golden Fleece

THERE ARE ONLY TWO SUCH GLITTERING RAM'S FLEECES, this Fleece of Zeus and the more famous Golden Fleece involved in the story of the hero Jason, who was anointed with the herb of Prometheus by Medea. It is unlikely that the two are not symbolically identical.

In the case of the latter, it was homophonous with the "golden apples" of the Hesperid Garden, where Perseus harvested the Gorgon head as a mushroom, then placing it in his food sack: the Garden located on the western frontier is analogous to the Tree of the Golden Fleece on the far eastern, for the "Fleece" like the "Apple" were both to be plucked from a Tree guarded by a serpent. The words for "apple" and "sheep, ram" are identical in Greek, *melon / malon,* cognate with the Dutch *maal,* meaning "cow." In addition to *malum,* which Latin assimilated from Greek and the pre-Greek language, Latin has another word of its own for "apple": *pomum,* so that *Malaceae* and *Pomaceae* are synonymous in botanical classification. This other word for apple derives from Sanskrit *go-pas,* meaning "herdsman," as in the Latin verb *pascere,* from which English has words like "pastor" and "pasture." It is this word that is responsible for another large group of European cognates, such as French *pomme* and Italian *pomodoro,* the later designating the tomato as the "golden apple," an exotic import from the New World. And when these words don't mean "apple," they mean "ball," as in English "pome," and perfectly descriptive of the "egg" stage of the mushroom from which the mushroom-capped beings like the Dioskouroi

hatched. This root occurs in Greek as the verb *pate-esthai*, meaning, “to eat.” Inevitably the Latin word for “apple,” which is homophonous with the adjective for “evil,” led to its identification as the Forbidden Fruit that made man like unto a god in the Garden of Eden, displacing, as we have seen, the fig.

> Such nectar as you Nymphs mixed for us to drink that day near Demeter of the Threshing-floor. On her heap of winnowed grain may I plant the great winnowing-shovel, while she laughs with us with sheaves and poppies in either hand.
>
> THEOCRITUS IDYLL VII, VERSES 153 SQ.

> The Fathers speak of subterranean chambers in which orgies were held. The sanctuary area and its surroundings have been cleared to the rock level everywhere, but no subterranean chambers were brought to light. Such chambers never existed.
>
> GEORGE MYLONAS

The Vision

THE HIEROPHANT BEGAN THE DRINKING by tasting the Holiness; the initiates then followed his example. “I have opened the Hamper; I have drunk the *kykeon*,” was the final password. Then they waited, as they listened to his chanting in the darkened Telesterion, for the moment of revelation – a vision unmistakably induced by what had been drunk. The meaning of that experience had been rehearsed by months of rituals, the traditional set and setting for a chemically induced visionary experience. We are told that at Eleusis the final indoctrination had involved the manipulation of the sacred objects enclosed in the Mystic Hampers, but this surely would be impossible.

The tedium of thousands one by one performing this rite would surely have been unbearable. Thus the senseless enumeration of the Hamper's contents is another mistaken attempt to find the Holiness in material objects: sacred cakes of different shapes and meanings, balls of salt, pomegranates, poppies, fig branches, a serpent, the *thyrsos*, characteristic objects from the differing lives of the male and the female, or whatever else one might want to toss into the basket to denigrate its true significance. The ritual actions, the so- called *dromena* of the initiation, had been accompanied by recited words, the *legomena.* All these things were secret, and what we learn of them from late sources comes from people who did not understand, or did not care to bother with their meaning, or were describing local versions of the rites, that may well have differed from the ancient initiation.

> What the Mystery Hamper contained was a divine child who was consubstantial with a magical plant.

The identity of the drug in the *kykeon* must have been part of the secret, the *aporrheta* or things that should not be spoken, something hidden in the riddle of its clearly proclaimed ingredients; but there was also the *arrheta,* things that were beyond the power of speech. Both levels of prohibition pertained to the Mystery, the first a well-kept secret, the second something fundamentally ineffable.

The *Anodos* or Surfacing

WHAT THE INITIATES SAW was of the latter type of prohibition. It went beyond the power of speech to someone who had not seen and experienced it. Outside the Telesterion they had passed the Cave of Pluto as they proceeded up the incline along the final stretch of the long Sacred Road toward the great Hall of the Mystery. It was here, in the narrow channel at its depths, plunging down to subterranean caverns, that Persephone had descended into the netherworld. They had journeyed in the soul along that same shamanic

pathway. But at the moment of the vision, the Hierophant had thrown open the door on the Goddess's little House, and the triumphant procession, led by the joyous shouts of Iakchos, emerged into a brilliance of mystical Illumination, born again through the vulva of the scheming Iambe, back into this world, just as Persephone herself surfaced back with them. They saw the Return of the Goddess, the *Anodos*! Here again, the archaeologists have confused the ancient testimony and have failed to find anything underground to accommodate the initiates.

> According to Aristotle, the Mystery was an experience rather than something learned, basically, it was arrheta or unspeakable.
>
> ARISTOTLE, FRAG. 15

6

The Abduction of Persephone

THE SACRED MYTH THAT NARRATES THE EVENTS involved in the founding of the Mystery is recorded in the so-called *Homeric Hymn to Demeter,* an anonymous poem dating from the 7th century BCE, seven centuries later than the probable date of the first performance of the ceremony. In it we are told how the goddess Persephone was abducted by her bridegroom Hades to the realm of the dead when she picked a special hundred-headed *narkissos* while gathering flowers with a sisterhood of maidens called the Daughters of Ocean in a place called Nysa.

All Greek words with a doubled sigma, like the archaeological site of Knossos or the word for "sea," *thalassa,* derive from the language spoken by the agrarian cultures dwelling in the Greek lands before the coming of the immigrating Indo-European Greeks. The Greeks themselves, however, thought that the *narkissos* was so-named because of its narcotic properties, obviously because that was the essential nature or symbolism of Persephone's flower. This *narkissos* flower is the origin of "narcotic" in English. The other flowers mentioned, the rockroses, saffron crocus, violets, iris, and hyacinths, all conform to the traditions of the bulbous or psychoactive darlings of the Goddess.

The marital abduction or seizure of maidens while gathering flowers is a common theme in Greek myths. Plato records a rationalized version of such stories in which the companions of the seized maiden Oreithyia are called the sisterhood of the Pharmaceia or, as the name means, the "Use of Drugs." The particular myth that Plato is rationalizing is in fact one that traced the Athenian descent of one the priesthoods at Eleusis.

The grandson of this Oreithyia was Eumolpus, the "Beautiful Singer," who was the first Hierophant at Eleusis. His son was Keryx, the '"Herald,"

from whom the other of the two Eleusinian priesthoods was descended. These traditions are unmistakable. The Eleusinian priesthood were pharmaceutical herbalists and the ecstatic abduction of Persephone was experienced in the context of the ritual gathering of some magical or psychotropic bulbous plant. We might remember too that Eurydice, Kreousa, and Helen were all picking flowers when they also experienced the Sacred Marriage with death. Such ecstatic rituals associated with flowers formed a very ancient tradition in Greek religion and can be traced back to precedents in the Minoan period. There can be no doubt that Persephone’s abduction was a drug-induced seizure.

ON OF PERSEPHONE

Agr

IN A P of the Ilissos ve
Ather reas ravished Orithy d of
mime ion as the time for the Le ry,
which ry preparation for the Greater t
Eleus s. A god of vine intox ich
is an psychoactive ca one's
ecstat ed in Febru v d
Anth Flowers," sin the ith
garde me fl
enum seas not his
time foreign underw local
Eleus is the one Harmalos o
slope Greater stery took plac
Boëd ecret Sanctuary, abou e the
autun ough t
harve e
Myst contrast between the grain as the
fundamental foodstuff, and wild growths, many of them toxic.

The myth of the abduction, however, is not about Persephone personified as the seed, placed underground either at the sowing or for storage through the dry summer months, both of which are explanations that have been proposed. Nor is her return an explanation of the vegetative renewal of spring, since the return was celebrated at the fall initiation. Anthesterion was also the month of the Dionysian festival of the Anthesteria, which celebrated the completion of the wine's fermentation with a festival like the Mayan Days of the Dead, Hanal Pixán, in which the dead return for a period to join in the festivities with their still living relatives.

> 'Is this where they say Boreas abducted Oreithyia?' 'No, not here, but two or three miles downstream, near the sanctuary at Agrai, where there is an altar for the north wind Boreas. The people who want to rationalize the myth say that she was blown off the nearby cliff as she was playing with Pharmaceuticals.'
>
> PLATO, PHAEDRUS 229B SQ.

In the Turkish period, there was still standing in the mid 18th century a small temple on the slopes of Hymettos at Agrai, decorated with a frieze depicting the abduction of maidens called Hyacinthidae, daughters of the hyacinth flower. Oreithyia was one of these Hyacinthidae. Her name is a transparent epithet for a "woman experiencing ecstasy on a mountain."

> Across the Ilissos is a district called Agrai and a temple of Artemis Agrotera (the Huntress). They say that Artemis first hunted here when she came from Delos, and for this reason the statue carries a bow.
>
> PAUSANIAS DESCRIPTION OF GREECE, ATTICA 19. 6.

Agrai itself was named as a “Hunting Preserve,” and the role of Dionysus there was probably his manifestation as a Hunter, not of animals, but of his ecstatic brides. In this persona, he was equated with Zagreus, the son of Zeus, disguised as a serpent, and his daughter Persephone. Zeus attempted to hide him from his jealous wife Hera, but she found him and directed the Titans to tear him to pieces. Zagreus turned into a bull, but was unable to escape, and the Titans ate him, half of him cooked and the other raw, all except for what was called his still beating “heart” (punning upon the fig tree phallus and heart), which Zeus found and gave as a potion to Semele. The potion made her pregnant with Dionysus. In this persona, he was assimilated to the Iakchos of the joyous Mystery procession.

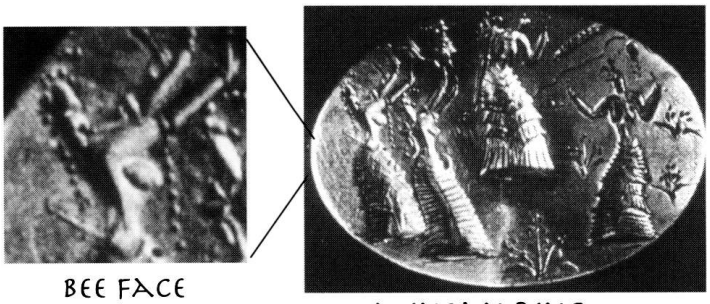
Bee maidens

PERSEPHONE’S DRUG-INDUCED ABDUCTION is absolutely appropriate to the religions of the agrarian peoples who preceded the immigrant Indo-Europeans in the Greek lands. Those religions centered upon the female’s procreativity and the cyclical rebirth and death of both plants and mankind. She was the Great Mother and the entire world was her Child. The essential event in those religions was the Sacred Marriage, in which the shaman priestess periodically communed with the realm of spirits within the earth to renew the agricultural year and the civilized life that grew upon the earth. Her male consort was a vegetative spirit, both her son who grew from the earth and the mate who would abduct her to the fecundating other realm, as he possessed her upon his death.

When the roving Indo-Europeans settled in the Greek lands, their immortal Father God of the sky, who was Zeus, became assimilated to the pattern of the dying and reborn vegetative consort of the Great Mother. There are indications of this assimilation in the traditions about the Zeus who was born and died in Crete; whereas the Zeus who is head of the Olympian family is immortal like all of the other eleven. Furthermore, archaeological remains from the Minoan-Mycenaean period of Greek culture frequently depict visionary experience encountered by women engaged in rituals involving flowers.

Most explicit is a golden ring, probably the official badge of authority for a shaman priestess, from Isopata in Crete. It depicts a sisterhood of women

in a flowering meadow, whose flowers are apparently the *narkissos.* They are experiencing a vision indicated by the single disembodied eye, a universal symbol of the visionary trance. Similar disembodied eyes decorate the Palace of Quetzalpapálotl at the ancient 10th-century site of Teotihuacán, which by the time of the Aztecs already lay in ruins, but was considered their spiritual origin. There the botanical involvement of the vision is indicated by the "tears" of entheogenic fluid dripping from the "eyes" of flowers.

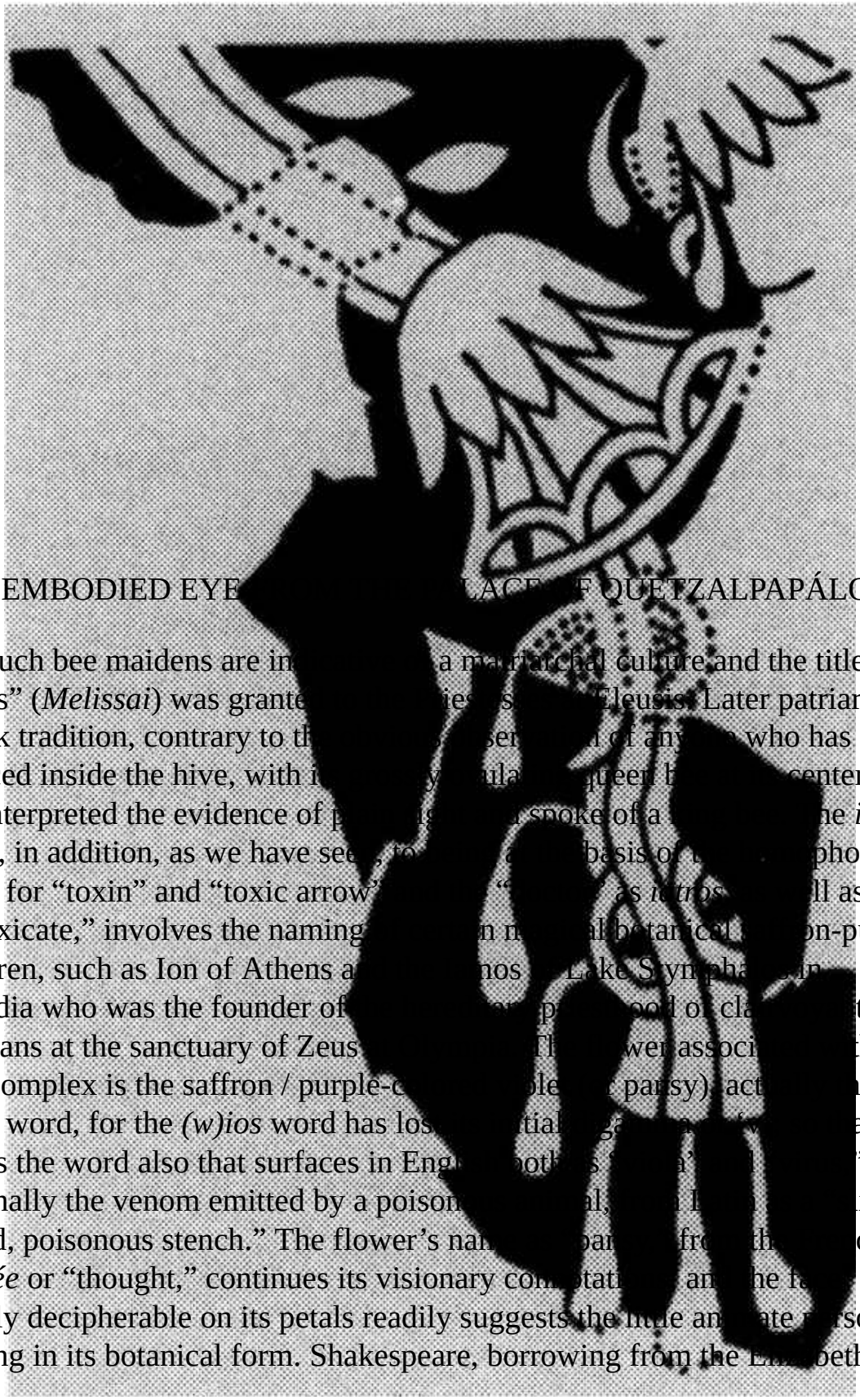


BEE FACE

MINOAN RING

> There I was, poised in space, a disembodied eye, invisible, incorporeal, seeing but not seen.
>
> R. GORDON WASSON

The women depicted on the ring, moreover, have the narrow waists and exposed breasts favored in Minoan couture and the segmented limbs characteristic of insects, and their heads, upon elongated necks, are similarly those of an insect. They are, in fact, bees, gathering the nectar of the flowers, able to convert it into the nourishing sweetness of honey, but equally into the source of their "toxic" or *ios* sting. It is a self-evident conclusion that the poison and the honey are both harvested from the flowers. Serpents similarly acquired their own toxins by ingesting poisonous herbs, or conversely they contaminated plants by their proximity, with the plants absorbing the serpents' toxicity.



DISEMBODIED EYE [illegible] LACE [illegible] F QUETZALPAPÁLOTL

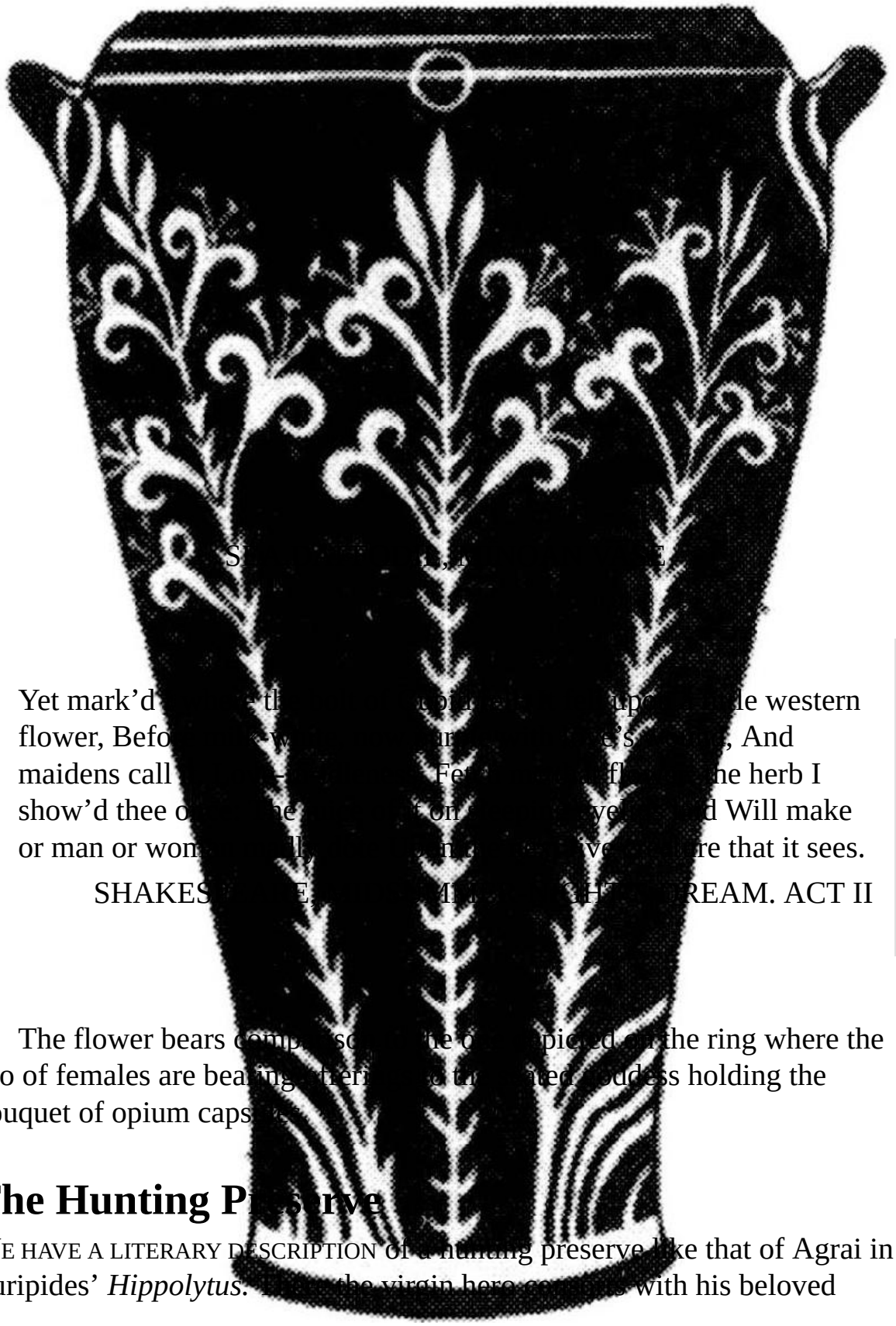
Such bee maidens are in [illegible] a matriarchal culture and the title of "Bees" (*Melissai*) was grante[illegible]ies [illegible] Eleusis. Later patriarchal Greek tradition, contrary to th[illegible] ser[illegible]n of any[illegible] who has ever glanced inside the hive, with i[illegible]y [illegible]ula[illegible] queen b[illegible] center, misinterpreted the evidence of p[illegible]g[illegible] spoke of a [illegible]he *ios* word, in addition, as we have see[illegible], to [illegible] basis of t[illegible]phonous word for "toxin" and "toxic arrow" [illegible] as *iatros* [illegible]ll as "intoxicate," involves the naming [illegible]n n[illegible]al botanical [illegible]on-purple children, such as Ion of Athens a[illegible]nos [illegible] Lake Syn[illegible]ha[illegible]in Arcadia who was the founder of [illegible] p[illegible]ood of cla[illegible]t shamans at the sanctuary of Zeus [illegible] Fl[illegible]wer associ[illegible]th this complex is the saffron / purple-c[illegible]ple [illegible] pansy), act[illegible]e same word, for the *(w)ios* word has los[illegible]tial [illegible]ga[illegible]f w[illegible]at this is the word also that surfaces in Eng[illegible]oth[illegible]s '[illegible]a' [illegible]' originally the venom emitted by a poison[illegible]al, [illegible]imy liquid, poisonous stench." The flower's nam[illegible]par[illegible]fr[illegible]th[illegible]ch *pensée* or "thought," continues its visionary com[illegible]tati[illegible] an[illegible]e f[illegible] clearly decipherable on its petals readily suggests the little an[illegible]ate p[illegible]rson lurking in its botanical form. Shakespeare, borrowing from the Elizabethan

herbals, knew of the plant's visionary properties and used it to cause the alteration of perception that leads to the confusions of love in *Midsummer-Night's Dream.*

> Describing the herbal empowerment of a future shaman, lamos: "The infant lay hidden amidst the lake's reeds in an impenetrable thicket, drenched in the saffron-purple radiance of violets; two serpents with the eyes of an owl nourished him with the harmless venom of bees."
>
> PINDAR OLYMPIA VI, 45 SQ.

The plant depicted on the Isopata ring is seen also in Minoan frescoes and on Mycenaean daggers, although implements of such workmanship were probably neither culinary ware nor instruments of warfare, but sacral knives intended for the offering of victims, in the case of human sacrifices, victims sedated by the visionary sacrament, as was, for example, also the custom amongst the Mayan-Aztecs. It is the sea daffodil, *Pancratium, maritinum.* Its botanical name indicates that it is an "All-powerful" pancratiast. It became assimilated to Christianity as *chreston*, Greek for the "best," but a corruption of Christ's name (*Christus*). It formerly was known as the plant whose juice empowered the Persian shaman-priests or Magi; since that plant is the haoma (Soma) sacrament, it would appear that the daffodil is one of the surrogates for the mushroom. The sanctity of the sea daffodil persists in modern Greece, where it is now associated with the Virgin, like the Madonna lily, and called the *Panaghía* or "All Holy." It bears lily-like flowers of pink and white stripes on a naked scape. The bushmen of Dobe, Botswana, know this bulb as *kwashi,* a powerful sacred hallucinogen, capable of producing vivid and colorful visions. The bulb is not eaten, but rather it is slashed open and pressed onto self-inflicted wounds on the foreheads of participants. The intoxicating principle is transported directly into the circulatory system, creating an immediate reaction. A related species is *Pancratium speciosus,* used by the Caribes of the West Indies under the name of *ognon* or *gli* as a

powerful emetic. Some species are quite narcotic and are purported to have caused death; still others are classified as cardiac poisons.



> Yet mark’d [illegible] the western flower, Before [illegible], And maidens call [illegible] herb I show’d thee once: The juice of it on [illegible] Will make or man or woman madly dote Upon the next live creature that it sees.
>
> SHAKESPEARE, A MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM. ACT II

The flower bears comparison to the one depicted on the ring where the trio of females are bearing offerings to the enthroned goddess holding the bouquet of opium capsules.

The Hunting Preserve

WE HAVE A LITERARY DESCRIPTION of a hunting preserve like that of Agrai in Euripides’ *Hippolytus*. [illegible] the virgin hero consorts with his beloved

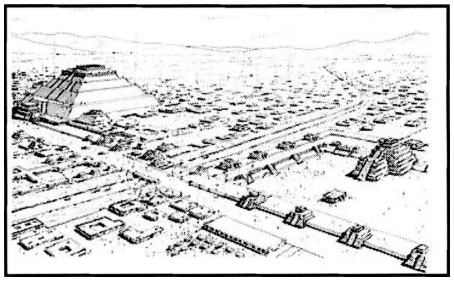
Artemis in a hunting garden tended by modest Shame, *aidos*, for which concept in English we use the Latin pudendum. Unfortunately, however, his stepmother Phaidra has conceived an overpowering lust for him, ever since she first caught sight of him when she went to Athens for the Eleusinian Mystery. She yearns to replace Artemis as his beloved in that garden of virgin modesty. Once she reveals her love to him and is rejected, pudendum causes her to kill herself, pretending like a Persephone that she has been ravished by her lover. This principle of *aidos* is the feeling elicited by the sacrosanct, those things that can be uncovered only in appropriate contexts, like Baubo or Hathor, where they open up the doorway to the otherworld. Such are the sexual organs, the *pudenda* or, as the Greeks called them, the *aidoia.* The goddess Aphrodite comments ominously that Hippolytus does not know that the gate to the otherworld gapes open before him. Artemis, furthermore, had religious and ritual functions pertaining to the rite of passage from maidenhood into motherhood; and in the tragic literature, the theme of the maiden's marriage to Hades occurs repeatedly in a flowering place sacred to Artemis. A temple of Artemis lay just outside the portal to the Eleusinian sanctuary, where the initiates danced until exhaustion, before entering for the final revelation.

> When he was in Greece, he dared not attend the celebration of the Eleusinian Mysteries, at the initiation of which impious and wicked persons are warned by the voice of the herald from approaching the rites.
>
> SUETONIUS NERO, XXXIV

The Initiation of Herakles

IT WAS SAID THAT HERAKLES HAD BEEN THE FIRST to be initiated at the Lesser Mystery and that the rite was initiated to cleanse him from the bloodguilt incurred by his murder of the centaurs while being entertained by Pholos at Pholoë in Arcadia, or some other violent act of his past career. It is this

ceremony that is depicted on the Lovatelli Urn and the Torre Nova sarcophagus. The only requirement for initiation was that the candidate not be guilty of murder and be able to speak Greek. The Fleece was first used for the purification of Herakles, and the Torchbearer still employed it at Agrai. Despite the mythical precedent, however, the purification apparently could not cleanse away the stain of murder. Although most of the Roman Emperors were initiated, Nero's critics maliciously claimed that he shied away from the rite, conscious of his own guilt. Nor could there have been so many candidates stained by murder, inasmuch as death in battle did not incur bloodguilt. The purification must have been less specific.



TEOTIHUACÁN

It was this purification that allowed Herakles to descend to the netherworld to fetch back the dog Cerberus, an episode in which he found and rescued Theseus, who in one account of the purification was the one who had offered Herakles the initiation at Agrai. Herakles apparently never experienced the Greater Mystery since by chance he was there at Persephone's House on the occasion of the descending procession of initiates and he was fortunate enough to surface back to this realm with them through the Goddess's Door. Thus he defiantly declares that he has no need for the Mystery.

The chorus in Aristophanes' *Frogs*, as they pass by the swampy ground in the cemetery of the Keramikos at the beginning of the Sacred Road, proceed, as they say, in "full manly fashion" on their way to knock upon the Door with their "torches," which by common comic metaphor could also be called "mushrooms"; and they enigmatically refer to this preliminary of the Lesser Mystery. It involves an ecstatic experience induced by an intoxicant that went by the name of "eating bull."

The Bull Stall and the Queen

WE ARE TOLD that there once was a young Athenian who was much taken with the beauty of a courtesan in one of the brothels of Corinth. His attempts to repay her favors in some special way were continually frustrated by the madam, who insisted upon confiscating all private gifts.

To give the girl, who by chance had the name of Metaneira, something that would be hers alone, he hit upon the idea of offering her an immaterial, and thereby inalienable, benefit: he would pay the expenses for her introduction into the blessed community of those who had seen the Mystery. This was the price for the sacrificial pig and the fees of the various priests and guides, about a month and a half's wages for a workingman, plus the expense of the stay in Athens.

> There were two reasons why he brought her here: first, because he would have a beautiful mistress without cost, and secondly, because her earnings would procure supplies and maintain the house; for he had no other income save what he might get by chicanery.
>
> DEMOSTHENES AGAINST NEAIRA, 41

> He considered that everything else which he expended upon her was being taken by the woman who owned her, but that from whatever he might spend on her behalf for the festival and the initiation the girl herself would profit and be grateful to him.
>
> DEMOSTHENES AGAINST NEAIRA, 21

And so she was allowed to travel to Athens, together with the madam and seven of her girls from the brothel, amongst them one named Neaira. He paid for all of them.

The lover lodged them all with a friend, out of regard to his wife and his elderly mother who resided with him, while they prepared themselves by the preliminary rites. The full sequence would require more than a year’s residence in Athens

Neaira was eventually bought by two lovers, who later divested themselves of their investment upon their marriages, and she was then acquired by Phrynion, who abused her.

Although many had witnessed the public display of her arts as a courtesan, she eventually ran off with Stephanos, shamelessly absconding with the possessions of her owner and abusive lover, and with her, her three illegitimate children, one of whom was her daughter Phano.

Stephanos beat off the attempts of her former owner to reclaim his property, and then he and Neaira ran a con game, inciting guests to sleep with Neaira and then extorting a payment for the sexual outrage. This was a necessary ploy since Neaira had become accustomed to living well and Stephanos had no other recourse.

> She was skilled in recognizing the budding beauty of young girls and knew well how to bring them up and train them artfully; for she made this her profession, and she got her livelihood from the girls.
>
> DEMOSTHENES AGAINST NEAIRA, 18

The daughter Phano they passed off as a citizen, although illegitimate, born of a foreigner, and a prostitute. They married her off as the daughter of Stephanos to a poor man of noble heritage, who, despite his poverty, had inherited the ancient sacral role of the aristocratic priesthood, still maintained after the transition of the city to democracy, as the titular King Ruler, Archon Basileus, one of the ten archons in charge of the city. His wife became the titular Queen or Basilinna of Athens. The scandal was that a woman of her background was totally unqualified for such a role. It is only because of the trial against Neaira’s husband that we know what her illegitimate daughter Phano as Queen was supposed to do.

> If he found as a lover of Neaira any young alien rich and without experience, he would lock him up as caught in adultery with her, and would extort a large sum of money from him.
>
> DEMOSTHENES AGAINST NEAIRA, 41

In her official capacity as Queen, she slept each Anthesterion with the god Dionysus in a temple in the Marshes at the beginning of the Sacred Road, opened only once each year. It was known as the bull stall. This ritual was a perpetuation of the shamanic experience that established the city's renewal of its accord with the otherworld. It was an event of the Dionysian Anthesteria, but it is not clear whether it involved the revels at Agrai, which occurred in the same month. But the implications are that an ecstatic "bull" sacrament was eaten and was also involved in the Queen's shamanic marriage to the god.

> This woman offered on the city's behalf the sacrifices which none may name, and saw what it was not fitting for her to see, being an alien, and despite her character she entered where no other of the whole host of the Athenians enters save the wife of the King only; and she administered the oath to the venerable aged priestesses who preside over the sacrifices, and was given as bride to Dionysus; and she conducted on the city's behalf the rites which our fathers handed down for the service of the gods, rites many and solemn and not to be named. If it be not permitted that anyone even hear of them, how can it be consonant with piety for a chance comer to perform them, especially a woman of her character and one who has done what she has done?
>
> DEMOSTHENES AGAINST NEAIRA, 73

The Queen's marriage to the god with the bull sacrament was similar to "Queen" Kreousa's ecstatic encounter with Apollo in the cave beneath the Acropolis while she gathered the saffron *krokos.* That cave, as is the custom, is now sacred to the Virgin.

> His winnowing-shovel is in His hand and he will cleanse His threshing floor and gather His grain into the storehouse, and the chaff he will burn in inextinguishable fire.
>
> MATTHEW 3. 12

The "saffron" and the "bull" are identical shamanic lovers in the myth of Europa's abduction by Zeus in the guise of a bull that "breathed the scent of the *krokos* to inspire or put breath into" her for the ecstatic journey to Crete.

The Winnowing-Shovel

THE INTOXICATING "BULL" SACRAMENT and the Sacred Marriage for the shaman Queen was probably not something for the general public, nor was the special cleansing by the Torchbearer with the "Fleece of Zeus." The Lovatelli Urn shows another ritual of purification, employing the symbolism of the winnowing-shovel. Herakles, after offering the sacrificial pig, while the priest holds the platter of mushrooms, is next seen seated on his lion skin, his head shrouded. A priest holds the winnowing-shovel above his head.

The winnowing-shovel is emblematic of purification in a decidedly botanical context. It is used to separate the kernels of grain from the chaff, by tossing the two into the air so that the chaff, which is lighter than the grain, will be carried by the wind further along on the threshing floor. It separates the good from the bad.

Purification of Heralkles the winnowing-shovel, close-up, Lovatelli urn

7

Dionysus

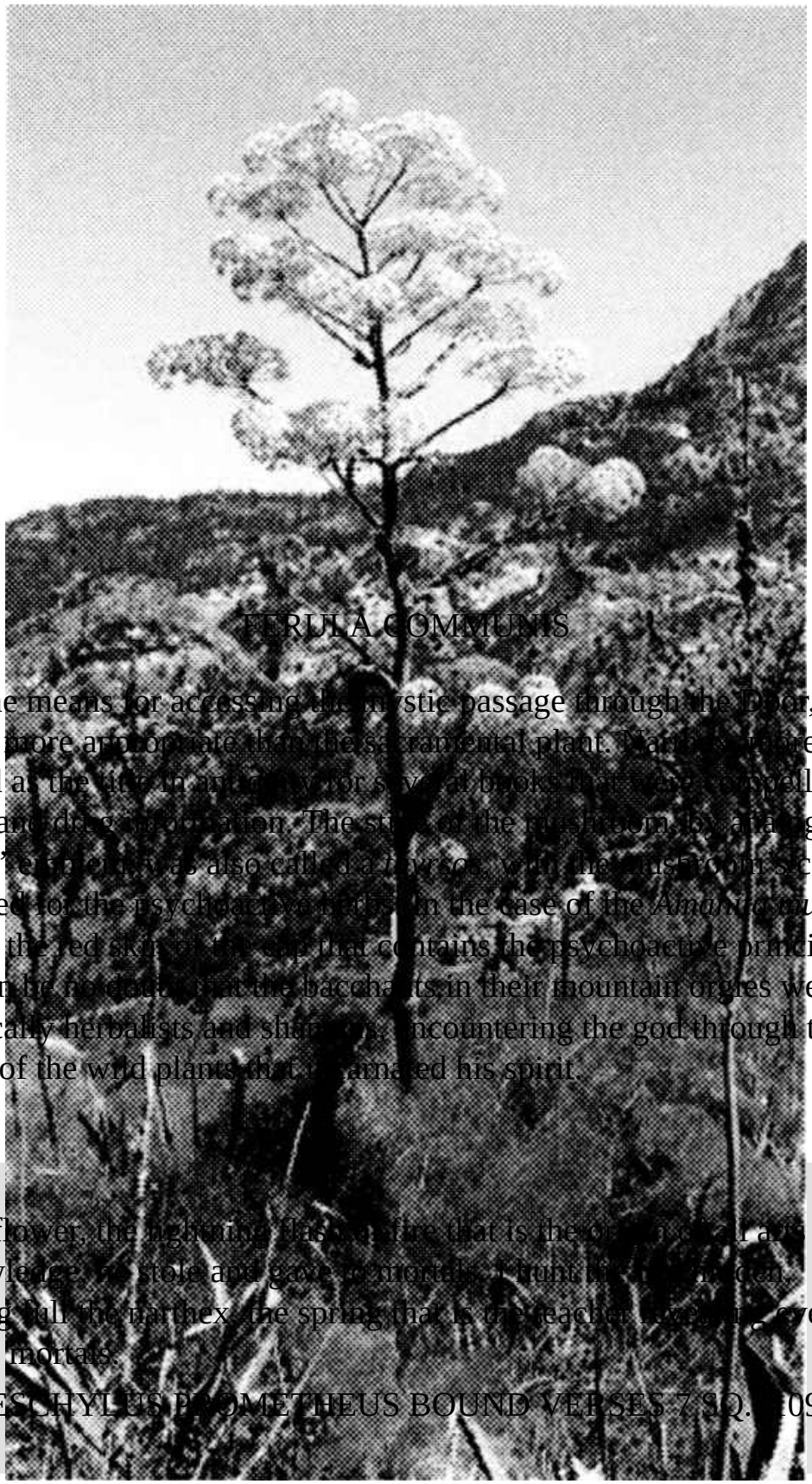
IT WAS AS DIONYSUS that the Zeus who had been assimilated as consort to the Mother Goddess survived into the classical period. His name designates him as the Zeus of Nysa, for Dios is a form of the word Zeus. Nysa was not only, as we have seen, the place where Persephone was abducted, but also the name for wherever was enacted that same nuptial encounter involving the passion of Dionysus' birth and death. Thus, we can document that there was a Nysa on Mount Parnassos, another in Euboea, still another on Helicon, the mountain sacred to the Muses, another on the Nile, one more in Ethiopia, still others in Libya, Scythia, Caria, and Arabia. When he possessed his women devotees, the "mad-women" called maenads (cognate with "maniac"), or bacchants, in accordance with his other name as Bakchos (Bacchus), he was synonymous, as Heracleitus informs us, with Hades, the lord of death and the nuptial abductor of the goddess Persephone. Nysa was similar to words for bride and ivy, as well as sleep. Nysa was the Land of Nod. In Modern Greek, *nystazein* means to "get sleepy."

Thyrsos

THE MAENADS, like Persephone, also gathered flowers. We know this because their emblem was the *thyrsos*, a fennel stalk stuffed with ivy leaves. According to Theophrastos, the ancient 4th-century BCE authority on plants, such hollow stalks were customarily used by herb gatherers as receptacles for their cuttings, and the ivy that was stuffed into the maenads' stalks was sacred to Dionysus and reputed to be a psychotropic plant.

Narthex

THE FENNEL REED (*Ferula communis*) that served as the receptacle for the herbs stored in the *thyrsos* was called narthex in Greek, literally the *narko-thex* or “narcotic storage,” a word that also came to designate the vestibule of a Christian basilica, as the gateway to the sacred space beyond, in much the same way that the Sheila-na-gig’s vulva was worked into the Christian doorways, or similarly the vulvas of Baubo and Hathor offered a view through to Paradise, for religions, as we have seen, assimilate and perpetuate the symbols of their predecessors.



FERULA COMMUNIS

As the means for accessing the mystic passage through the Door, nothing could be more appropriate than the sacramental plant. Giant fennel, moreover, was used at the time in antiquity for several books that were compellations of medical and drug information. The stem of the mushroom by analogy to the maenads' *thyrsos* was also called a *thyrsos*, with the mushroom's cap substituted for the psychoactive fruits. In the case of the *Amanita muscaria*, it is only the red skin of the cap that contains the psychoactive principle. There can be no doubt that the bacchants in their mountain orgies were symbolically herbalists and shamans, encountering the god through the medium of the wild plants that incarnated his spirit.

> The flower, the lightning flash of fire that is the source of all arts and knowledge, he stole and gave to mortals. Thunderstruck, filling full the narthex, the spring that is the teacher [...] of every art to mortals.
>
> AESCHYLUS PROMETHEUS BOUND VERSES 7 SQ. – 109 SQ.

Prometheus first stole that divine spirit as celestial fire, hiding it as a "flower" in the narthex, and he implanted it as intelligence in mankind. The burning red tip of his narthex similarly suggests a particular species of mushroom, or at least that the gathered plant is psychoactive. His father was called Iapetos, a name that clearly indicates a family of shamans, since it means someone who "flies" with a "toxin," Ia-petos, and Prometheus himself means something like "clairvoyance," the ability to look forward. The fire he stole was the food of the gods, nectar and ambrosia, and he set up the etiquette for eating with the performance of the first sacrificial meal, dividing up the carcass of a butchered bull at a place known as Mekone or Poppy Town. It is the same region around Corinth where, as we have seen, by another account men first came into existence, metamorphosed out of mushrooms. Prometheus, like Bes and Ptah, was the creator of men.

> If the aire be troubled and disquieted by thunders: during that season there will be good store of such Mushromes, especially, I say, if it thunder much.
>
> PLINY NATURAL HISTORY, 19.37

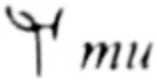
Thunder-child and Bellowing Bulls

DIONYSUS HIMSELF WAS BORN PREMATURELY in the mystical seventh month during a winter snowfall when his celestial father struck his earth bride Semele at Thebes with a bolt of lightning. In the same manner mushrooms were engendered wherever lightning struck the earth. In actual fact, the mushroom's fruiting stage is like a tiny egg in the ground, awaiting the autumnal-winter rainfall to absorb its water and rapidly expand into the characteristic fruiting mushroom; but around the world, the birth of mushrooms is attributed not to the rain, but to the fall of the thunderbolt. Greek art stylized the thunderbolt as a dumbbell shape or double mushroom, sometimes suggestive of a budding fiery plant. It was the emblem of Zeus, and the association of the plant with the fall of celestial lightning implies its

incarnation of fire, power and illumination. The bull was the animal associated with Zeus, and his mate Hera bore the epithet of “Cow,” *boöpis.*

> The land roared with the bellowing of mushrooms.
>
> ARISTIAS PERSEUS TRAGEDY

Semele, in addition to the fall of the thunderbolt, also was said to have conceived Dionysus, as we have seen, when she drank a potion compounded of her own son’s heart, which was all that survived when he was torn to pieces, having metamorphosed into a bull. So too was Dionysus like his father also called the Thundering God, for despite the gentleness of his infancy and his sometimes effeminate appearance, he could suddenly metamorphose into the virulence of his full manhood, in which form he was a bull, rending the earth and thrusting upwards, as at his birth, announced by a “bellowing,” the *mykema* that signified the presence of the *mykes* or “mushroom.”



THE SYLLABLE MU IN THE MINOAN-MYCENAEAN SYLLABARY, REPRESENTED BY A BULL’S HEAD

This bellowing of the thunderbolt and the bull that incarnated it was heard at Mycenae when Perseus plucked the mushroom. There was, in fact, another way of telling the story that associates the mushroom of Perseus with his phallus: when he tried to puck his sword from its sheath, he discovered that it had lost its mushroom, the knobby phalloid handle or chape, which was metaphorically called a *mykes* because of its physical resemblance; this he took as a sign to found the city. Since Perseus is consubstantial with the fungal sacrament of his shamanism, he has fungal characteristics and his own phallus is also the mushroom that he harvests.

Under the names of Athena's serpentine foster child Erechthonios and the primordial serpent king of Athens Erechtheus, this "Bellower," as the name indicates, is the autochthonous creature, sprung from the land. Bellowing was also the sound made by the Gorgon Medusa when he harvested her head. So, too, was it heard when Medea picked the Promethean herb for the chrism with which she empowered Iason (Jason). Similarly, Agave in the *Bacchae* heard the sound at the start of the revel on Mount Kithairon. It should be obvious that bulls, real bulls and not the plant that lurks beneath the metaphor, do not roam on mountainsides.

The mooing-bellowing *mu* sound was written as a bull's head in the Minoan-Mycenaean syllabary, a manner of writing in which the sign indicates a consonant-vowel combination. The Greek speaking immigrants later replaced the Minoan syllabary and adapted the Phoenician system for writing, in which only the consonants were indicated, by modifying it, since there were more consonants than they needed, to use some of the supernumerary consonants to mark the vowels, inventing the alphabet, which is the system of writing employed in Latin and the modern European languages. The Latin and Greek alphabets are essentially the same as the consonantal system of Phoenician and Hebrew, differing only in the manner of stylizing and regularizing the signs.

If the mushroom played a vital and secret role in primitive Greek religion, what could be more natural than that the standard word for 'mushroom' would fall into disuse through a religious taboo and that the Greeks substituted an alternative fungal term that was a homonym of 'mystery'? You can hear the pun, see the gesture, 'Mum's the word,' with the index finger over the mouth.

R. GORDON WASSON

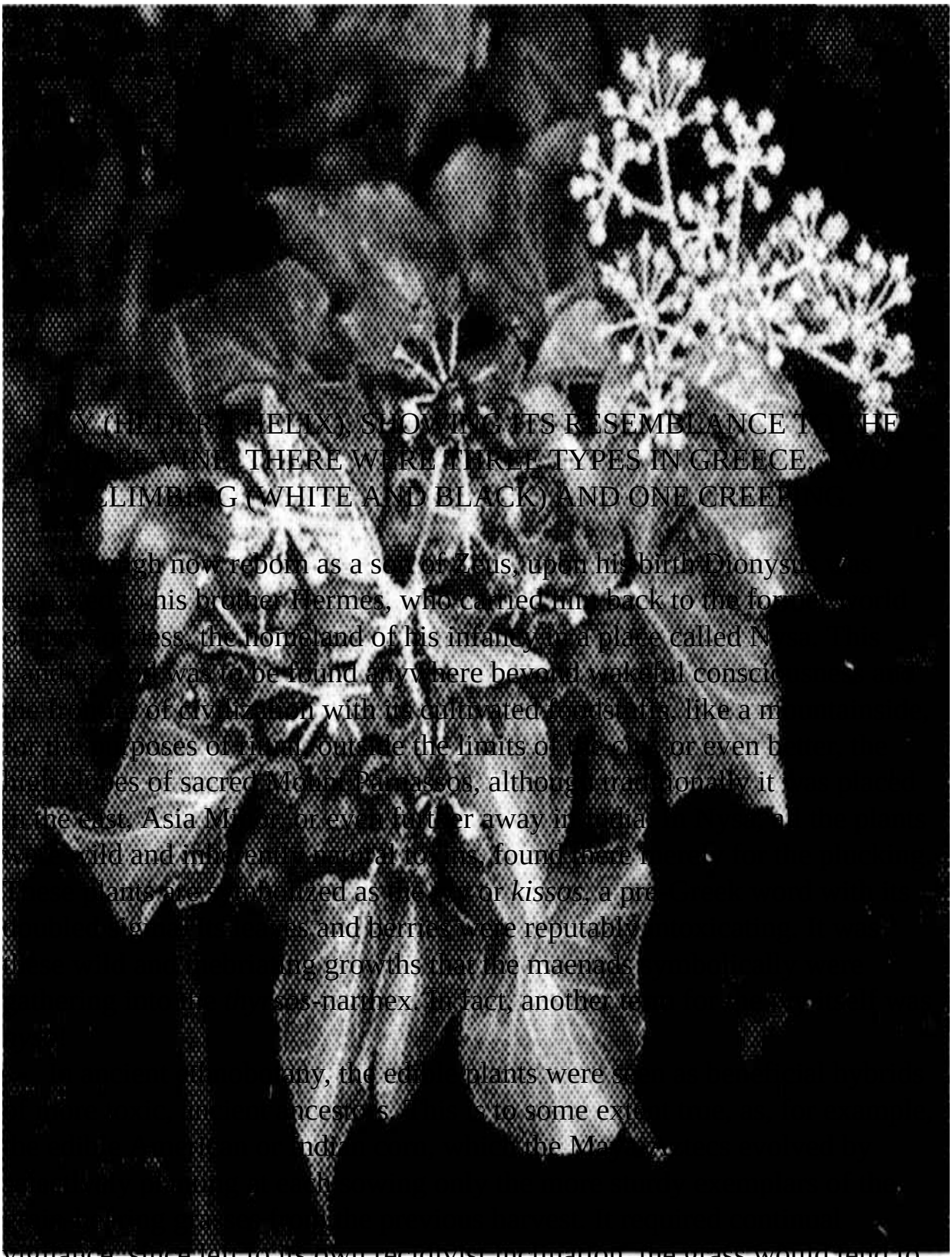
Taking the cup and blessing it, He gave it to them, saying: 'Drink of this all of you. This is My blood for the New Contract with God,

> shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. I say onto you, there is no way that I drink again of this fruit of the vine before that day when I drink of it anew with you in the kingdom of My father.'
>
> MATTHEW 26. 27 SQ.

The words for "mystery" (*my-sterion*) and "initiate" (*my-stes*) have the same *mu* syllable as their root, the voiced nasal labial consonant, made with the lips pursed, emitting no sound, for a secret well kept, like English "mum's the word." The same syllable occurs in squinted eye or "myopic" (*my-ops*), which is also the word for the gadfly; this was also called "estrus" in Greek (*oistros*), a metaphoric complex that brings us back to the mooing-bellowing of the estral cow, both in the form of the Gorgon sisterhood and the Cow-maiden Io, goaded by the drugged sting of the gadfly. This "goad" was called both *oistros* and *myops,* and was more than just the estrus, but denoted a full range of inspired rage and madness. In the case of Io, whose color was crimson, like Ion, lamos, and Iole, the gadfly's goad had multiple disembodied eyes as the ghost of Argos.

Ivy and the Vine

TO UNDERSTAND THE SYMBOLIC SIGNIFICANCE of Nysa, where Persephone was abducted when she plucked the narcotic *narkissos,* we must discuss the opposition between the ivy and the vine. The ivy's toxicity is the dichotomous counterpoise to the inebriation of the wine, the opposition of the natural poison to the one that is civilized, the manufactured product of the cultivated grape vine, with which Dionysus is primarily identified. This wine is obviously an entheogen or a drink consubstantial with deity as perpetuated in the Christian Eucharist, where it represents the redeeming blood of the Savior, poured out and shed at the time of His sacrifice.



Y (HEDERA HELIX), SHOWING ITS RESEMBLANCE T[O] THE
E VINE. THERE WERE THREE TYPES IN GREECE,
LIMBING (WHITE AND BLACK) AND ONE CREEP

gh now reborn as a son of Zeus, upon his birth Dionysu
his brother Hermes, who carried him back to the for
ess, the homeland of his infancy, to a place called N
was to be found anywhere beyond wakeful consci
of civilization with its cultivated fields etc. like a m
poses of ritual outside the limits of the city or even b
es of sacred Mount Parnassos, although traditionally it
he east, Asia Minor or even further away in India
wild and mysterious, as far as this, found there
lants are mythologized as the *kissos* or *kissos*, a pre
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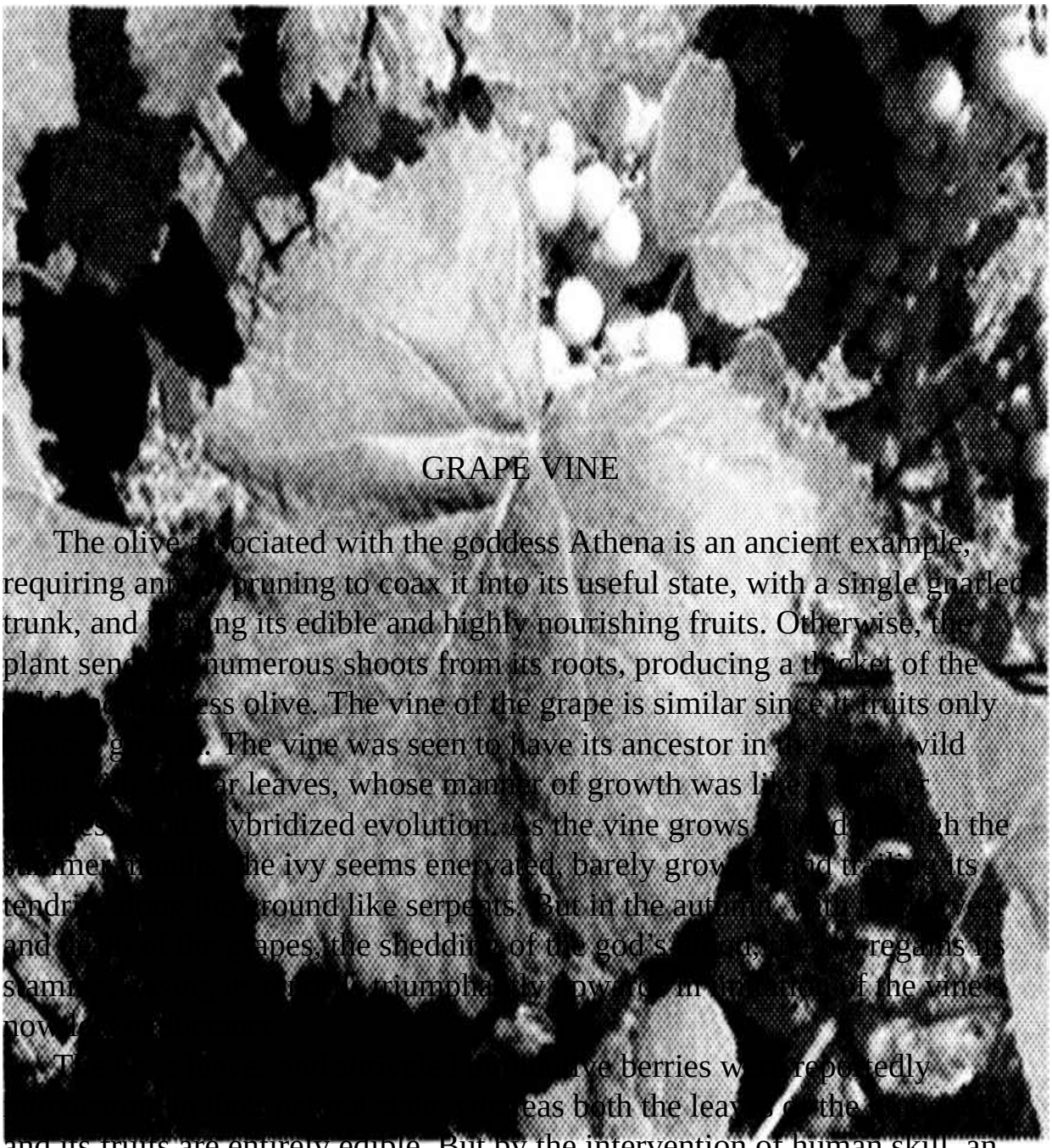
vigilance, since left to its own recidivist inclination, the grass would tend to revert to its more primitive form. This can be sensed in the case of American

corn, with its enormously developed edible cob, still larger today than its Mesoamerican precedents. If left alone, the kernels would all fall in the same spot; and when they germinated, they would compete and crowd each other out, making each sprouting smaller than the previous, as the grain reverted to sheaves of its more ancient, less nourishing grassy ancestor.



GRAPE VINE

The olive associated with the goddess Athena is an ancient example, requiring annual pruning to coax it into its useful state, with a single gnarled trunk, and bearing its edible and highly nourishing fruits. Otherwise, the plant sends numerous shoots from its roots, producing a thicket of the wild, useless olive. The vine of the grape is similar since it fruits only [illegible]. The vine was seen to have its ancestor in the [illegible] wild [illegible] leaves, whose manner of growth was like [illegible] hybridized evolution. As the vine grows [illegible] through the summer [illegible] the ivy seems enervated, barely growing and trailing its tendrils [illegible] around like serpents. But in the autumn [illegible] and [illegible] grapes, the shedding of the god's [illegible] regains its stami[illegible] triumphantly [illegible] of the vine's [illegible] now [illegible]

[illegible] ve berries w[illegible] repeatedly [illegible] eas both the leaves of the [illegible] and its fruits are entirely edible. But by the intervention of human skill, an intoxicant can be grown on the shed juice or blood of the plant, something

that bears the imprimatur of culture, as opposed to the uncouth or more primitive intoxicating herbs in their natural state.

It was the discovery of the vine amongst the herbs of Nysa that afforded Dionysus the opportunity to chance the dangerous journey back to civilization, bringing with him the mediating powers of his drink. It was a perilous journey on which he was beset by pirates, but the apotheosis of his magical plant, metamorphosed as the mast of his sailing ship, afforded him safe passage. And the gift that he brought with him to the centers of civilization was the drink that would allow others to access the land of Nysa, and with appropriate etiquette not become addicted to its allure, but to be further strengthened as cultured, like the grape vine itself, by the vicarious compensatory experience of the wilderness that is the mirrored image of civilization. His name as the Zeus of Nysa, in fact, indicates his bridging of the two worlds. Similarly, although born visibly only of a father, he was destined to discover his mother and reunite her to her mate on Olympus with the new name of Thyone, the “Ecstatic” bride.

> Only he and his wife and their steward knew of it. And whenever they drank this red wine as sweet as honey, he poured it filling one cup to twenty parts of water, and it smelled a sweet fragrance from the mixing krater.
>
> HOMER ODYSSEY, 9. 205 SQ.

Thus the ivy gathered into the *thyrsos*-narthex symbolized the more ancient precedents to the vine of the grape. Wine, moreover, was obviously a civilized and controlled fungal growth. Mushrooms themselves were considered a fermentation of the earth, a perfect symbol of rebirth from the cold realm of putrefaction that was the moldy otherworld. A similar process was sensed in the frothing effervescent turmoil whereby the fungal yeast converted grapes into wine. In wine the god had found his greatest blessing for mankind; here his untamable, wild nature had succumbed to domestication. He himself was said to have first discovered the properties of

this plant that had grown from the spilled blood of the gods when he noticed a serpent drinking its toxin from the fruit. Dionysus taught man the way to calm this gift's violent nature by diluting it with water. And customarily it was mixed with water that the Greeks drank their wines.

Wine and Water

THIS CUSTOM OF DILUTING WINE deserves our attention since the Greeks did not know the art of distillation and hence the alcoholic content of their wines could not have exceeded at most about fourteen percent, at which concentration the alcohol from natural fermentation becomes fatal to the fungus that produced it, thereby terminating the process. The yeasts occur naturally on the skins of fruits; when crushed, the yeasts are put in contact with the sugars of the juice, growing upon them and excreting alcohol, until the liquid environment becomes hostile for continued growth. Simple evaporation without distillation could not increase the alcoholic content since alcohol, which has a lower boiling point than water, will merely escape to the air, leaving the final product weaker instead of more concentrated. Alcohol in fact was never isolated as the toxin in wine and there is no word for it in ancient Greek. The process of distillation was not discovered until the 10^{th} or 11^{th} century, when the alchemists gave it the name of aqua vitae or "water of life." The word alcohol, in fact, is Arabic, first used for the distillation of metals, *al-kuhl,* designating powdered antimony used as an eye shadow cosmetic. Hence the dilution of wine, usually with at least three parts of water, could be expected to produce a drink of only slight inebriating properties.

> She tossed a drug in the wine of which they drank, the anodyne nepenthes and something that relieves the bile of anger, something to make one forget all troubles. Whoever might drink it, when it was mixed in the krater, would for a day not shed a tear, not even if his mother should die or his father, not if his brother be slain before his eyes, or even his own son.
>
> HOMER ODYSSEY 4. 220 SQ.

That, however, was not the case. The word for drunkenness in Greek designates a state of raving madness, and the most common one is not derived from “wine” or *oinos*, but from “honey,” *methy.* We hear of some epic wines so strong that they could be diluted with twenty parts of water and that by the Roman period still required at least eight parts water to be drunk safely, for, according to report, the drinking of certain wines straight actually caused permanent brain damage and in some cases even death. Just three small cups of diluted wine were enough in fact to bring the drinker to the threshold of madness. Obviously the alcohol could not have been the cause of these extreme reactions. We can also document the fact that different wines were capable of inducing different physical symptoms, ranging from slumber to insomnia and hallucinations. It is patronizing to assume that the ancient Greeks were simply unable to hold their liquor; in cultures where the drinking of wine is customary, the drinker becomes inured to its effects in moderate quantities.

> It is hard to grasp the immensity of the ramifications of considering ‘wine’ in antiquity as an ‘infusion of visionary dissociative psychoactive plants,’ the wholesale changes required to the conventional scholarly view of the nature of Hellenistic-Roman religion and culture. Even the best books, especially the “best,” most authoritative books, serve to spread and deepen the misreading of Hellenistic-Roman religion and culture as ‘lacking mystic religious experiencing.’
>
> MICHAEL HOFFMAN

The solution to this apparent contradiction is simply that ancient wine, like the wines and beers of most early peoples, did not contain alcohol as its sole inebriant but was ordinarily a variable infusion of herbal toxins in a

vinous liquid, a procedure still employed in the country brews of Europe. Unguents, spices, and herbs, all with recognized psychoactive properties, could be added to the wine at the ceremony of its dilution with water. Specifically documented as psychoactive additives to the wine are frankincense (which induced madness and even death in greater quantities), myrrh (a soporific), marjoram, oil of crocus, cyclamen, and oleander. A connoisseur in antiquity would know how to combine his wines so as to produce particular effects: for example, there were two wines from the island of Thasos, one a somnifacient and the other a stimulant. A description of such a mixing ceremony occurs in Homer's *Odyssey*, where Helen prepares a special wine by adding the euphoric *nepenthes* to the wine that she serves her husband and his guests. The fact is simply that the Greeks had devised a spectrum of ingredients for their drinks, each with is own properties.

> The Argives say that Kleomenes died horribly mad, and the Spartans themselves say that this madness wasn't from some kind of demonic possession, but that from consorting with the Scythians he had taken up drinking his wine undiluted and that this was what drove him mad.
>
> HERODOTUS 6. 84

Wine was a generic term. For example, the Hebrew text of the Bible is more specific with eight words that all are translated as "wine," with one of them (*yayin*) distinguished as being the wine made from grapes, which means that the others were not, and another (*shekar*), meaning a "strong inebriating water," which would mean an herbal potion. In Greek, every drink that induced drunkenness was termed simply a wine. Christ on the Cross was given "myrrh in wine," not "vinegar," as it is usually translated, but a "spiced wine."

> Next, as he stumbles home at night from the Anthesteria with his head in a fever, let the ghost of some kind of drunk and raving Orestes appear and break open his head! And as he reaches for a stone in the dark to defend himself, let his hand find a fresh turd!
>
> ARISTOPHANES ACHARNIANS, VERSES 1164 SQ.

The wine of Dionysus was a magical potion, like the god himself, a mediation of the two worlds that he reunited, the wild herbs of the Goddess in Nysa and the cultivated plant from which was grown a sophisticated inebriant. The wine's quality was called its "flower," perpetuated today as the wine's "bouquet": and a wine deficient in flower showed its lack in the nature of the resultant inebriation. This flower could not refer to its fragrance since Greek wines smelled predominantly of pitch, apparently from the material used to seal the porous earthenware containers. The adding of resin to wine is still practiced today in Greece to produce the characteristic national drink called retsina; the pine whose resin flavors the drink was one of the non-vinous plants sacred to Dionysus. The commercially offered restinas, moreover, are sparing of the resin, whereas the village brews are often much more intoxicating and more strongly flavored. Wine, moreover, in Modern Greek is called "wine" or *oinos* only in the archaizing artificial "Purifying" or *Katharevousa* dialect; in common parlance, it is *krasí,* the "mix." Dionysus still bore several epithets relating him to trees, Dendrites, Dendreus, and Endendreus, and he was called the god of the "Abounding Sap," Phleus; one of his emblems was the sacred bough, the *bakchos,* from which he has his older name as Bakchos.

The extraordinary virulence of undiluted wine offers still further proof that Greek wine contained herbal additives. A certain Erasixenus is described in an epigram as having died after drinking just two cups of wine straight in succession. And in a 5th-century comedy, the drinker of just one cup makes out his will before downing the drink. Several philosophers, moreover, were said to have drunk wine at the end of their lives to hasten death. An historian records a drinking contest which proves the same

virulence of ancient wine, for all the participants died, some immediately, others within a few days; the victor, who also died, had drunk four pitchers of undiluted wine. It was such wine that was supposed to have permanently deranged Kleomenes, the mad king of Sparta.

> ‘My god! Wine straight from the source: here’s to you! Perhaps we can come up with a good idea.’ ‘Here it is, straight from the source! About the wine, how is it with you? But how can a drunken man come up with a good plan?’ ‘Hey, what’s wrong with you? Do you dare criticize wine for its intelligence? You wont find anything more yielding in results. Whenever men drink this kind of wine, they get ahead in the world. So bring me a pitcher of it so that I can wet my mind and tell you something useful.’
>
> ARISTOPHANES KNIGHTS, VERSES 80 SQ.

Greek wine, even diluted, sometimes was hallucinogenic. At the Dionysian Anthesteria festival that celebrated the completion of the wine’s fermentation, specific mention was made of a drug in the wine that was responsible for opening the graves and allowing the departed spirits to return to Athens for a banquet with the living. The second day of the three-day festival was called *Choes* or the Feast of Pitchers after the characteristic triple lipped pitchers from which the celebrants drank. Each participant had an individual vessel and the wine was not mixed in the common *krater,* but individually prepared, in order to establish an appropriate boundary between the living and the revenant drinkers, who were brought together by the shared gift of the god. This was the festival at which children at the age of three or four were offered their first experience of drunkenness. The hallucinatory nature of the festival is indicated not only by the imagined widespread presence of ghosts, but by the actual depictions of them as decorations on the *choes.* In fact, someone in Aristophanes’ *Acharnians* wishes his enemy a bad trip at the Anthesteria by hoping that he encounters a mad hallucination, the materialization of the mythical Orestes, who was said

to have arrived at Athens, after killing his mother, just as they were celebrating the Anthesteria, and it was in his honor that the *choes* ceremony had been instituted, to offer hospitality to someone polluted with the guilt of blood.

A bas-relief found in the bed of the Ilissos River shows Herakles' arrival at Agrai with Hermes for the initiation into the Lesser Mystery. It indicates that although the Anthesteria was not part of the Mystery sequence, either its symbolism of contact with the realm of ghosts or else the drink involved in the festival was related to the Lesser Mystery, since both Herakles and Hermes are carrying *choes* pitchers.

Still more explicit about the visionary properties of certain wines is the opening scene in Aristophanes' *Wasps* where the two slaves in charge of keeping watch over their master to prevent him from escaping from the house in order to indulge his passion for serving on jury duty attempt to alleviate their tedium by drinking a potion of Sabazios, a Thracian analogue of Dionysus, the final *–zios* being the same root as the *Dios-* of his name: it causes them to experience a so-called "Persian Nysian sleep" in which they see strange visions.

That such drinks in comedy where phallic-shaped is implied in the obscene scene at the beginning of Aristophanes' *Knights.* There the two slaves lament the fact that their master the Demos or anally receptive "populace" of Athens has engaged a new servant, a leather sewer adept at making exactly the implement of his master's wildest desires. They attempt to alleviate their sorrows by masturbation, or in Greek "self coming or going," which is a pun on "desertion" or escape. They then coyly investigate whether the other is willing to drink the other off as oral sex, a duo on the flute. "How can I say it more decently?" as one of them asks. It will be a manner of dying "most manfully." Thus they decide to drink bull's blood, in the way that Themistocles chose to die. In view of the situation, it should be obvious how they will drink it, especially since the wine-sack was a metaphor for the male genitals. This obscene drinking inspires them with their ensuing plan. Since what they drink is a wine, it most probably is not the semen, but the urine, or more precisely, since it is an inebriant, the psychoactive metabolite of *Amanita muscaria.* This is a well-documented characteristic of that particular mushroom's use, the urine, in fact, being a

better source of the psychoactive toxins. It is both the most revealing detail of its use, and also the one most fervently denied to outsiders.

Furthermore, such well-known hallucinogens as *mandragora* and henbane were often compared to wine with respect to the drunkenness they induced. Plants, for example, were thought to contaminate each other by mere proximity. Thus hellebore imparted its drug to the grapes with which it was planted and for this reason the vineyards of Elea produced an emaciating and diuretic wine. The wines reserved for sacral purposes were even more intoxicating than those for social situations, for according to Plato, they were intended to induce madness. The vases for the maenadic Lenaean ceremony depict herbs being added to the sacred wine during the mixing in the presence of the effigy of the god Dionysus.

Symposium

THUS WINE WAS THE PRINCIPLE MEDIUM whereby the classical Greeks continued to partake of the ancient ecstasy resident in all the vegetative forms that were the child and consort of the Goddess. In social situations, the drinking ceremony was primarily for men at a “Communal Drinking” or Symposium. The host set the rules that regulated the drinking. He mixed the drink and determined the degree of inebriation that he would impose upon the revelers as they ceremonially drank a measured sequence of toasts. One could not abstemiously sip the drink. Each round was downed in order, as the conversation continued, with the singing of songs and the retelling of myths, as the men reinforced the homoerotic bonds that underlay culture, business, and politics. Women were excluded, for females in classical Greek society were denied education and were unsuited for such matters. Females called hetaerae or “companions,” who were not of the citizenry but professional entertainers from the slave class, on the other hand, were educated like men since they posed no threat to male dominance and were called upon for their wit, musicianship, and sexual expertise. The simple purpose of this drinking was to confront the danger of drunkenness gracefully. Thus the *kylix* with its broad saucer supported upon its stem would prove treacherous for a shaky hand.

SYMPOSIUM

A ritual still practiced in Greek parties today in Japan, where the men voluntarily exert themselves for days in advance to prepare for the feat of their endurance by eating foods that are reputed to foster sobriety, which they are called upon to demonstrate throughout the drinking by playing challenging very [illegible] in a Greek party, although ingenuity is induced, it is given [illegible] value by heightened sophistication. Even the hetaerae could [illegible] drinking parties for themselves, regarding together nude, singing [illegible] playing the [illegible] whose music [illegible] the hissing of the serpents [illegible] severed [illegible] dancing.

As a [illegible] sobriety the symposiasts gracefully hurled the last of the wine [illegible] not, however, sobriety was not the [illegible] in the literary account of a symposium in Plato's dialogue [illegible] the guests [illegible] the tragic dramatist Agathon have agreed to dismiss [illegible] and [illegible] normal rules for drinking, in view of their still suffering the effects of the party on the previous day; all

the participants eventually have fallen unconscious, except for Socrates and the two dramatists, one of comedy and the other of tragedy, whose enticing conversation we shall never hear upon the subject of whether the two genres of drama have the same inspiring genius.

The Theater of Dionysus

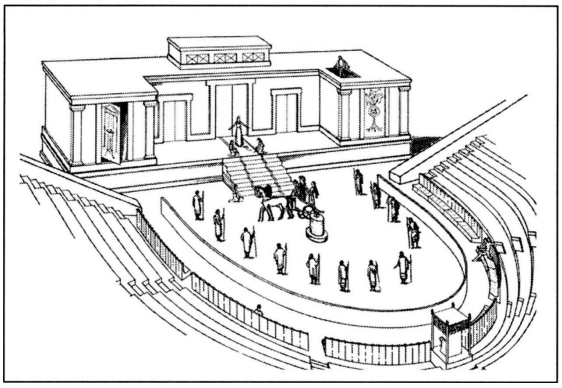
By its name, a theater is a place for seeing something sacred. From origins that go back to displays of ecstatic shamanic possession at the tombs of heroic persons, with the spirit of the deceased overtaking the priest and speaking through him or her to tell the dead person's story or myth, the drama as a ritual moved into the city in the 6th century. Here it was that the dangerous intoxication of the god was transmuted into its highest, most positive pedagogical function, moving from the countryside into the very center of the city, eventually accorded a large area on the south slope of the Acropolis, just below the monuments above it that were being built throughout the Classical Age, establishing it as the centerpiece of the city's justification to rule its allies as the finest representative of Hellenic culture. It was largely the drama that identified Athens as the spiritual capital of the Greco-Roman world, after the demise of its political dominance, responsible for making the dialect of Athens the *koine* or "common" tongue of the New Testament, as well as the basis of the Byzantine official and academic language.

Lets us make one thing clear: the Theater of Dionysus was a venue for public drinking. The wine for the Theater had a special name. It was called *trimma* after the additives "ground" into it. Throughout the several days of performances, lasting all day long, the audience, composed originally just of the men, signified their acceptance of the god's gifts by drinking, as they sat on the hillside, probably from the handy and easily portable flasks made out of goatskins.

> Having been forced to agree, although not any longer following the argument, they got sleepy; first to fall asleep was Aristophanes, and as day broke, Agathon. And Socrates having put them to sleep, got

> up and went away; and as was his custom, he went to the gymnasium, bathed, just like any other day, and thus he passed the day until evening when he went home and went to bed.
>
> PLATO SYMPOSIUM 223 D.

The nature of the Theater experience was one of mass spiritual possession. What might in other circumstances have been a ghostly visitation was transmuted into a communal feeling of oneness with their shared cultural identity and with the spirits who were the city's metaphysical allies from the otherworld. When the actors, all male, donned their masks, they were overcome by the persona each was meant to impersonate, as if there were, as Plato explained, a magnet in the otherworld to which they were being drawn. And as they sang or danced their roles in the round orchestra or dancing area, the bewitching passed through them on up to the spectators arrayed on the semicircular amphitheater provided by the natural incline of the slope. It was as though everyone were just an iron filing, aligned with the spiritual attraction from the other realm, delineating a field of force, with all attuned to the ghostly possession.



GREEK THEATER

There were traditions also that the poets themselves were possessed by the spirit of the wine when they performed or composed their dramas. Such for example, was what was said of the comedian Kratinos with his passion

for drinking bull. The drama itself is a drink that the poets have fetched from magical springs that flow in the gardens of the Muses, a potion composed of the commingled nectars of flowers that are tended not by human agents, but simply found in the metaphysical wilderness of Nysa by the ecstatic poets, as they go, like bees, from each to each. It is this special drink that the poets offer in the Theater, and through it the whole world seems metamorphosed, with rivers that flow with milk and honey. In the throes of this intoxication, the whole theater will fall to weeping along with the actor although they are celebrating a joyous festival, or their hair will stand on end for fear although they sit amidst their closest friends.

> If any of you happens to be an adulterer and you see the husband of your mistress here in the Theater sitting in the front seats, why then just fly off like a cock with your erection, and then after doing it with her, fly back here, with no one the wiser!
>
> ARISTOPHANES BIRDS, VERSES 793 SQ.

8

The Wild Hunt

MYTH ALWAYS SEEKS BALANCE. The female's Return to Nysa was the counterpoise to the Symposium and the Theater with its emblematic ratification of male dominance in society. It was the appropriate ritual for women to honor the other Dionysus, the Bakchos whose wild herbs fortified the wine, not the hetaerae, but the proper women who were the wives and daughters of the city.

They, who ordinarily could not leave the seclusion of their houses, not even to shop, periodically convened together on the mountainside beyond the city's walls, in the nearest version of the ancient sacred place called Nysa, joining into the sisterhood of olden times, into groupings of three, the maidens, the mothers, and the post-menopausal crones. There, with the old god, they regained their lost power from the days when the Goddess, in her three manifestations, reigned and the women controlled society. They were called maenads or mad women, or bacchants. Their emblem was the *thyrsos.*

Herbalists on the mountain

THE HERBAL INEBRIANTS that figured in the Dionysian rites of drinking required magical procedures when the herbs were gathered. As wild beings, whose spirits were akin to their particular guardian animals, the plants were the objects of a hunt. For example, in gathering black hellebore, a plant so potent that its toxin can be absorbed through the skin, the diggers took special precautions, which, in addition to prayers, garlic, and undiluted wine, included keeping watch for the flight of an eagle, which was the plant's particular animal persona. Sometimes, as with the gathering of henbane, a bird was tied to the plant so that the animal guardian actually became the agent for plucking it. The unidentified plant called *glykyside* or "sweet

pomegranate" was associated with the woodpecker; it had to be gathered under cover of night, otherwise the bird might peck out the herbalist's eyes.

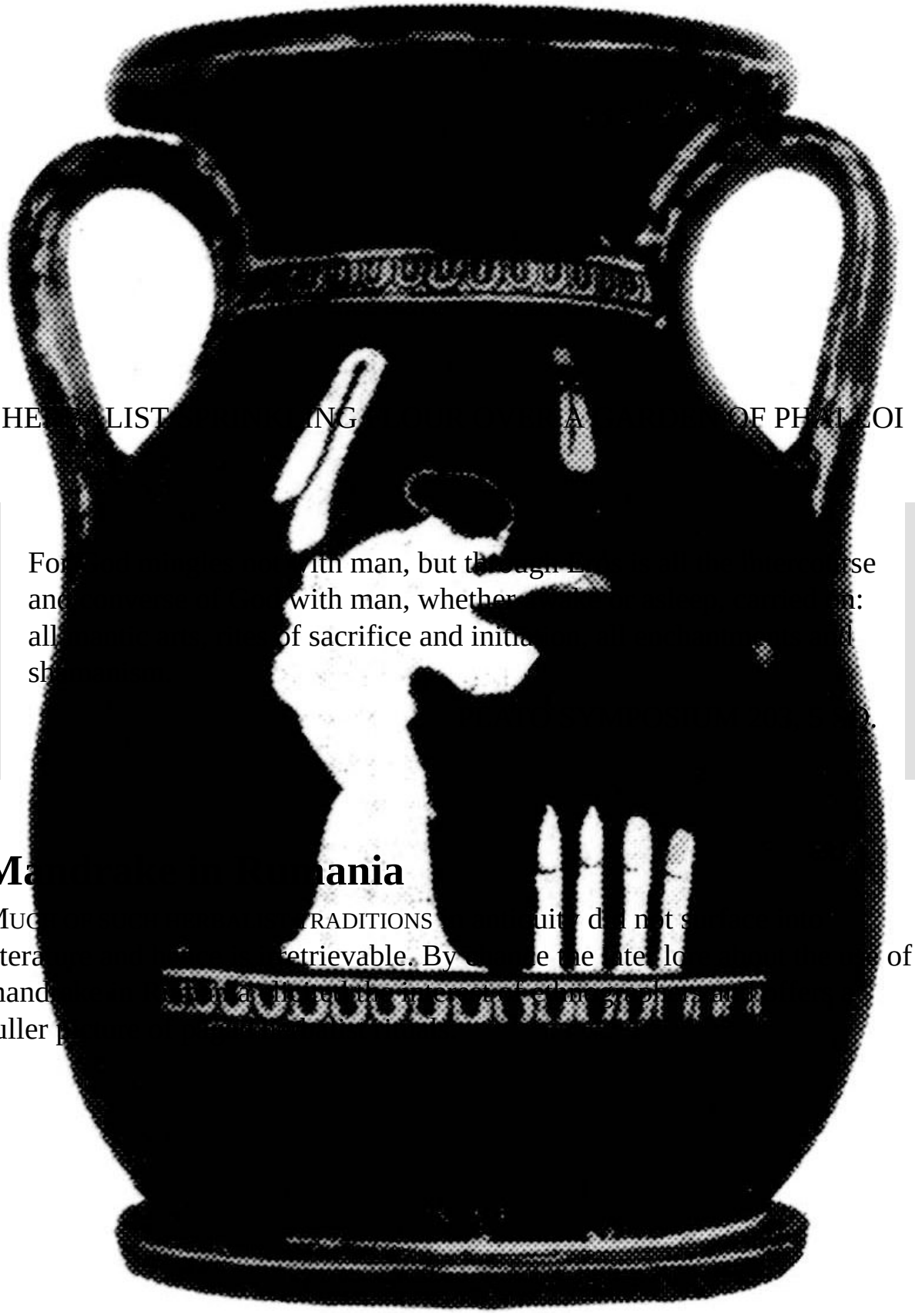
> I saw three revel bands of females, asleep from their dancing. Then throwing off the slumber from their eyes, they leapt up, a wonder of decorum to see, the young mothers, the old, and the maidens still unmarried.
>
> EURIPIDES, BACCHAE, VERSES 680 SQ.

And the ecstatic rapture that the plants might induce in religious contexts inevitably identified them as sexual forces. Worldwide, the women who pluck these sacred plants approach them with reverent deference and procedures of mimetic eroticism, for through the medium of the inspiring plant they become possessed by its indwelling deity.

Thus the woodpecker might just as easily attack the herbalist anally; in fact, the two alternatives, buggery or pecking out an eye, probably together suggest the erotic inducing of visionary experience. On a 5th-century *pelike* vase in the British Museum, a group of plants are depicted as phalloi growing from the ground; a female herbalist is shown sprinkling flour of some kind over them from a small chest, apparently as a preliminary to gathering them. It was actually named as "orgasmic travail" when the flower maiden Euadne eased Iamos from her womb into the profusion of flowers, bees, and serpents that earned his empowerment as a future shaman.

Herbal lore also endowed plants with emotions that the herbalist would have to assuage through appropriate gestures in order to alienate the hostility for the trauma of death in being picked. Accordingly, the same plant could produce contradictory effects depending on its attitude. Thus hellebore was considered the antidote as well as the cause of madness, and women wore the plant as a protective charm; it was similarly sprinkled around houses to ward off evil spirits. Similar dual effects were reported for aconite or wolfs-bane (assimilated to Christianity as monkshood), which some herbalists could compound with wine or honey so that it would have no ill effect,

whereas they could also prepare it in other ways so that it would be inevitably fatal, causing death at some predetermined moment, even as late as two years after administering the dosage. Those who tended the magical plants were also of dual natures. It was said that the Pharmakides or ‘“Sisterhood of the Drug” (or of the “Drugged Victim”) were two groups of women, one good and one evil. Hera summoned them into existence at Thebes when Herakles was born. A striking depiction of Herakles’ botanic consubstantiality is depicted on a Greek vase where the hero is seen being nursed on a mountain by Hera, otherwise known as his arch-enemy: Athena as his guardian had induced Hera to nurse him, and the botanical orgasmic nature of the event is indicated by Aphrodite, who is seen presenting an herb to the goddess. The milk of Hera flowed into the Milky Way; hence the inclusion of Iris, the “rainbow” and messenger of the gods, in the scene.



HE[illegible] LIST[illegible]ING [illegible]A [illegible]OF PHALLOI

For [illegible]ith man, but th[illegible]se
an[illegible] with man, whether [illegible]:
all [illegible]of sacrifice and initia[illegible]
sh[illegible]

Ma[illegible]ania

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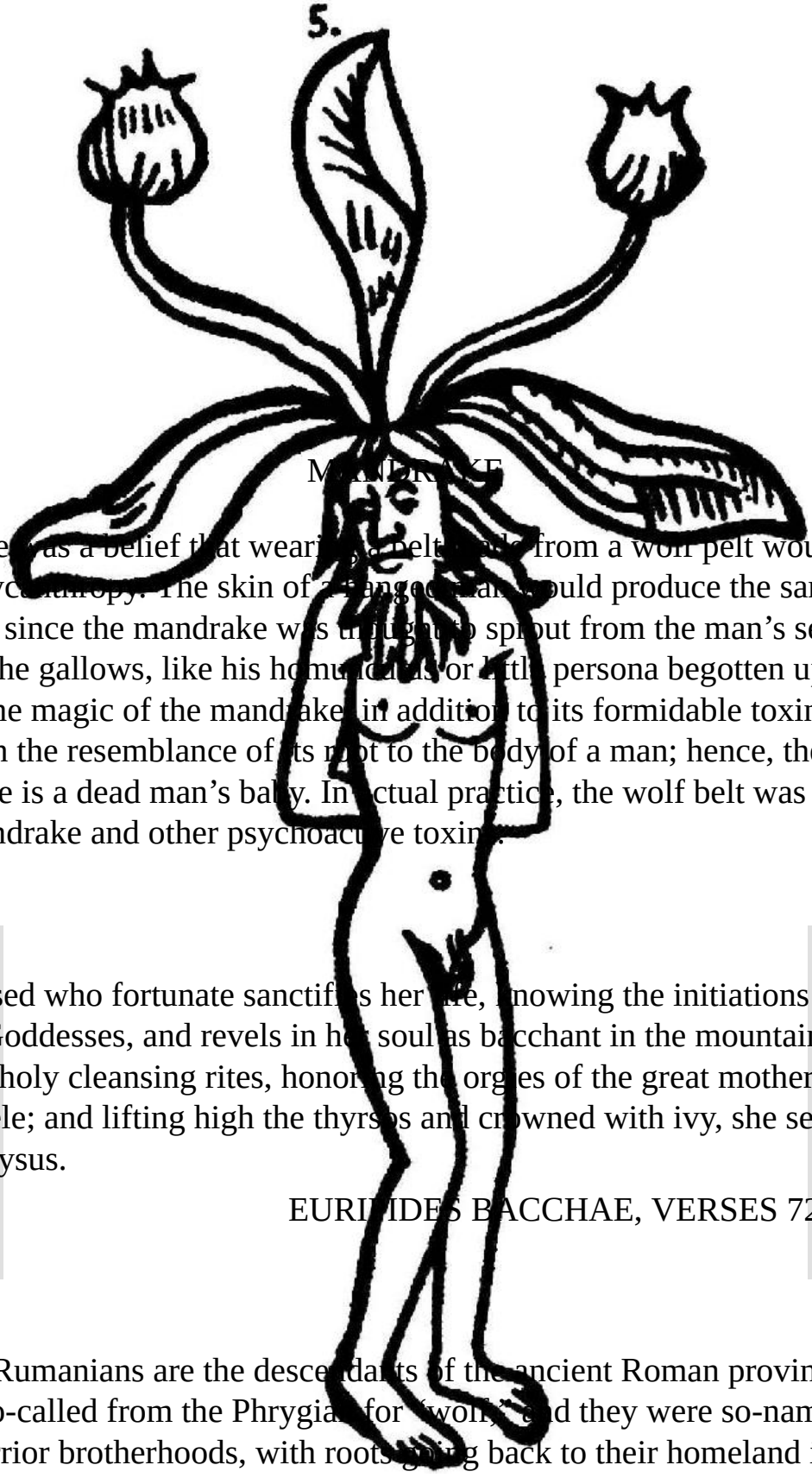


MANDRAKE

There was a belief that wearing a belt made from a wolf pelt would induce lycanthropy. The skin of a hanged man would produce the same outcome since the mandrake was thought to sprout from the man's semen spilt on the gallows, like his homunculus or little persona begotten upon his death. The magic of the mandrake, in addition to its formidable toxins, resides in the resemblance of its root to the body of a man; hence, the mandrake is a dead man's baby. In actual practice, the wolf belt was anointed with mandrake and other psychoactive toxins.

> Blessed who fortunate sanctifies her life, knowing the initiations of the Goddesses, and revels in her soul as bacchant in the mountains with holy cleansing rites, honoring the orgies of the great mother Cybele; and lifting high the thyrsos and crowned with ivy, she serves Dionysus.
>
> EURIPIDES BACCHAE, VERSES 72 SQ.

The Rumanians are the descendants of the ancient Roman province of Dacia, so-called from the Phrygian for "wolf," and they were so-named for their warrior brotherhoods, with roots going back to their homeland in Asia

Minor and a perpetuation of the haoma-wolves, documented on the funeral inscription for the Persian King Darius in a list of groups bearing offerings. They were a warrior fraternity that employed the haoma wolf-sacrament for their rites of induction. The Rumanians preserved aspects of the elaborate ritual for the hunt for the wolf-plant that would have been widespread throughout Europe, but unfortunately only occasionally documented.

The harvesters must approach the plant with enormous respect and deference, employing a ritual mimesis of erotic arousal. They must pretend to be nonchalant and completely disinterested in their task so that the little man-plant not become angry or take fright. The women go out at dawn, which it is the traditional time for harvesting herbal simples, while the dew is still upon them, and they penetrate so deep into the forest that not the slightest sound of civilization can be heard, not even the barking of a dog, otherwise the mandrake will lose its potency, since dogs and wolves are interchangeable. They are engaged on a dangerous pathway beset with bad men. The final goal is a sexual initiation, which will be realized upon reaching the plant, which is both the Good Mother and the Bad Seducer, the initiating crone and the seducing wolf. They offer it foods and address it with the most extravagant of sacred names.

As they approach the plant, that they have already located and marked on a previous excursion, they undress, undo their hair, recite conjurations, drink aqua vitae to the point of complete drunkenness, and dance completely nude, making the most wild movements with their heads, arms, and legs, running about like crazy women. The divested clothing, however, must be safely hidden, for without it, they will not be able to return to their former state. Or, in another version of the rite, they bring with them a new set of clothing, never previously worn, which they will offer to the plant, but which they will then wear in the future, in effect donning the mandrake's clothes. Or they expressly beg the mandrake to give them its clothing, so that they will become consubstantial with it.

The original plant of the haoma-wolves was the *Amanita muscaria.* In Huichol traditions, in addition to the peyote sacrament, there is a more secret rite of warrior initiation that involves the wolf-plant, which is the mushroom. Here in the Rumanian rite, as often happens, another plant has been substituted, but with a ritual that perpetuates some aspect of the original. Thus the women use a red ribbon or string to mark the plant, but the red

color apparently is not chosen because it would be easily discernable in the forest, because sometimes it is not used as a marker, but obscured by being included in the pile of the gifts of food offered the plant. The persistence of the red as a marker for the plant cannot pertain to the mandrake itself, since its flowers are shades of blue or violet and its fruit is yellowish, or at times orange. It derives from the original fungal sacrament, but other plants were always also involved in these wolf-belts and witches' pharmaceutics, and the mandrake, like hemp and Datura, appears to be a substitute for the original entheogen. The red marker for the Rumanian mandrake would appear to be an incidental detail, were it not that the herb gatherer's ritual of sexual initiation can be shown to match, item for item, with the fairytale of Little Red Top, better known for her Riding Hood. Fairytales were a way of hiding and preserving aspects of the old pagan religion from the Church that aspired to obliterate the religions that it supplanted.

> They held fawns in their arms or the whelps of wolves, nursing them like babies at their breasts. These were the mothers who had left their own infants at home and still had their breasts swollen with milk.
>
> EURIPIDES BACCHAE, VERSES 699 SQ.

Such rituals go back to antiquity. Pythagoras mentions the mandrake's resemblance to a homunculus. And Josephus Flavius, the Jewish historian of the 1st century CE, records that there was a plant glowing red at night by the Dead Sea that was difficult to approach because it would hide, and that it was lethally dangerous to harvest because it would shriek so horrendously that anyone hearing the cry would die. To pull it from the earth, a black dog was tied to it and inevitably died. This procedure is amply depicted in medieval herbals. The dark, juicy berries of the mandrake, moreover, were likened in antiquity to the grape both in appearance and in their hypnotic effect.

The Bacchants

THERE ARE MANY DEPICTIONS of such herbalist rites on vase paintings of Dionysus and his female devotees, and surprisingly, although the women are obviously drunken, rarely if ever are the women seen drinking wine. Only women took part and we do not know with exactitude what they did, especially since men for the most part wrote the historical record. What we have is a complex of metaphors for this activity, enactments that the men apparently respected and held in high esteem. That the women honored the god of Nysa by gathering wild plants, at least symbolically, rather than his later evolution into the god of wine is certain. Emblematic of the Nysian god was not only the ivy of the *thyrsos*, but also smilax and bryony, wild fruiting vines that similarly resemble the grape, as well as conifers and the oak, both trees that serve as host for the *Amanita muscaria*. They also spent the night sleeping together on the mountain, exhausted from their ecstatic dancing, with the hallucinatory revel beginning at dawn, so that some of what they experienced might better be described as in a dream state or altered reality. They apparently attempted to pacify and control their god through role impersonation as his mothers, nurses, and ultimately his brides.

MAENAD CLAD IN LEOPARD SKIN, WITH SERPENTS TWINED IN HER HAIR AND HOLDING A LEOPARD AS PREY OF THE HUNT AND A THYRSOS.

They loosened their hair upon their shoulders and tucked up their fawn-skins. Happy like a foal, the bacchant maid plies her limbs, skipping and leaping beside her mother in the pasture.

EURIPIDES BACCHAE, VERSES 695 SQ.

They were said, for example, to tear their babies to pieces. In Euripides' *Bacchae* tragedy, it is true that the Theban sisterhood is led by Agave, and they do dismember her own son Pentheus, limb from limb. He is, however, not a baby, but the city's king and the opponent of the god and the mountain revel, and they mistake him, in their deluded state, for a wild animal. Nor would any of this have happened if the Theban women had not been hindered from performing the mountain revel, for the rite is a return to a utopian natural world, and it turns nasty only when Pentheus's henchmen intervene. The henchmen barely escape alive. Then swooping down like birds, they scoured the surrounding plains, destroying the plowlands like an invading army; they pillaged houses and stole away babies, intending to eat them. We are dealing here with a pattern of opposition between the wild and

the cultivated, the natural mountain growths and the planted fields, which converts such denied natural forces into the terrifying release of pent-up repressed emotions in the form of the enemy of civilization itself. The fertility of the plain depends upon properly tending to the natural world as well.

In contrast, the troupe of Asiatic women who have come with the god extol the beauty of the experience. Even for the Theban maenads, the land flowed with the nectar of bees, milk and honey, a fountain of wine just pouring from the earth. This so-called wine is obviously not the wine of the vintage, which requires fermentation for over at least six months, from September to February. The revel took place in the winter and not in the vineyard; these drinks are metaphors for the earth's abundance of natural intoxicants. The main maenadic ceremony at the Corycian Cave on Mount Parnassos, in fact, occurred on the same night that the Athenian Basilinna slept with Dionysus in the Bull Stall Temple, which obviously implies some similarity in the nature of the shamanism of the mountain revels.

> They girt speckled leopard pelts about them, using serpents as belts, serpents that licked their cheeks.
>
> EURIPIDES BACCHAE, VERSES 697 SQ.

It was never their own babies that the frustrated women destroyed. Pentheus is rendered not because he is Agave's son, but because he represents the civilized god's opponent, his antithesis, the "suffering" and pain, as his name implies, that is the other half of joy and ecstasy. There were no babies on the mountainside. It is a metaphor. The plants were what they mothered, in one scenario for the harvesting ritual, before they turned upon their beloveds, plucking them, a terrifying but necessary cruelty. The only baby that is ever seen among the maenads is the infant Dionysus, whose botanical identity is manifest in his being laid to rest in the purifying winnowing shovel for his cradle.

Another metaphor for the plant was as an animal that was symbolically consubstantial with the animate principle resident within it. Thus the women, it would now appear, did not go hunting for plants, but for animals, which they somehow caught without prior training in the hunt and devoid of nets and implements that even men would have required, wolves and fawns, animals as fierce as cows and bulls, even leopards and panthers, animals not native to the Greek mountains, and in any case, not likely to succumb without violence to their bare hands. And they wrenched them limb from limb, the ritual of *sparagmós,* and ate them raw, the bloody *omophagía.* The significance of the prey is indicated by the fact that they are shown, not only holding the animals, but having donned their pelts, so that the spirit of the plant-animal becomes the persona of their altered identity. They become the animals.

Another of their prey was the hare, which they proudly offer to the god, but the meaning is the same. They are themselves the bunnies, offering themselves sexually to the god to infuse them with his possession, for another metaphor was that he goaded them with the estrus, and we also see them dancing in masquerade as bunnies in front of the deity.

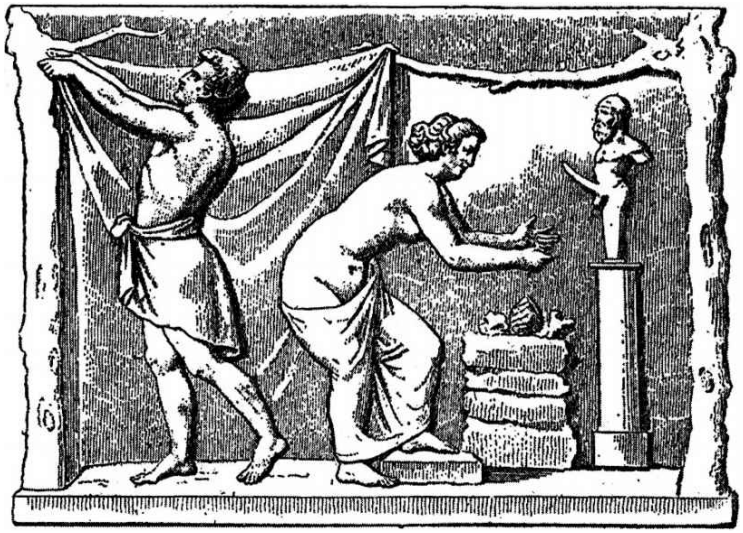
Similarly, they may masquerade as birds, indicative of their shamanic flight, for the whole mountain becomes transformed into a visionary experience.

Serpents, too, they hunted. We see them handling snakes, like the old Minoan priestesses, and wearing them woven into their hair or belted around their waist. The serpent also is an analogue to the plant in herbalist lore, with the two interchanging their toxins.

They held fire in their hands, or on their head, and it didn’t burn them. To have one’s head on fire, is there any better metaphor for the fever of ecstasy? The fire of ecstasy, moreover, emanates from the gathered plants. The god himself materializes to lead them on, holding up a burning pine torch, and the flames shoot also from the ivy leaves gathered into the narthex.

But most frequent in the depictions is the dancing to the music of the flute, always the maddening hissing sound of the double flute, with their heads thrown back in indication of their ecstatic state. They dance, moreover, with satyrs, the goat-men, who can only be creatures from a metaphysical realm, beyond the ordered cosmos. Apart from being grossly ithyphallic, they represent the recidivist forces, a return to the times of

female dominance, for the penis is obviously beyond a man’s conscious control when the beauty of the female magically induces its lustful arousal. The phallus alone represents this aspect of the god. The goat, moreover, demonstrated itself as the cultivated god’s enemy as being only too eager to graze upon the vineyards. Goats, moreover, will graze on everything, often indicating to the herdsman the psychoactive potential of certain wild herbs by their effect upon his herd. By one account, it was a goat grazing on the vine that led to the discovery of wine.



PRIAPUS

These goat men cavort sexually with the maenads. The women can themselves become goats, wearing a goatskin around their waist, and dancing as they expose their breasts to view, like the Minoan herbalists, clearly female, but displaying a penis as well, appended to their goat masquerade. They are all the god’s nymphs, which means simply his “brides”’ for the god, too, was apt to materialize in his various forms amidst their revels, dancing with them, disguising, what in his troupe of satyrs could not be hidden, namely his own virulent maleness by a masquerading dress, despite his beard, as a fellow female, sharing in the coven of the sisterhood liberated in the hunt. The cross-dressing of both the women and the god is indicative of their perfect sexual harmony.

But the god is also a bull, and although he himself is never depicted ithyphallic, like the satyrs, the erection beneath the disguise of dress can

materialize as a priapic idol, representing the son he begot upon the goddess Aphrodite.

The Birth of Grapes

THE DIONYSUS OF THE MOUNTAIN REVEL was not the god of the grape. That was a later development. In myth, Staphylos or “Grape Cluster” was his son, born of Ariadne, his wedded wife and a double of the huntress goddess Artemis. Dionysus himself was called Kissos or “Ivy,” but never Ampelos or the “Vine.” The depiction of the father and son on a *krater* for the mixing of the wine brings the wild and the cultivated intoxicants together making clear the relationship of the two in the drink the vessel was intended to contain. Dionysus is seated, dressed as a woman, on a chair draped with the leopard skin and holding the *thyrsos* and a vine branch of ivy. A maenad standing behind him has a plucked flower in her hand. On the god’s lap stands the young Staphylos, holding a branch of the grape vine and offering his father a *kantharos* of wine in the god’s own favorite drinking cup, while a woman behind him with swaddling cloth stands amazed at the event.

9

The Birth of Death

AT THE CLIMAX OF THE ELEUSINIAN VISION, the hierophant solemnly intoned the great refrain: “The Lady Brimo has given birth to the Lord Brimos.” It was accompanied by the striking of the gong that was used in the theater to imitate the sound of the subterranean thundering of an earthquake as the ground gapes, opening up a passageway from the netherworld.

He sang the ancient chant in a falsetto voice, for his role in the Mystery was asexual, a male who had sacrificed his gender to the Great Goddess. Some later who wished to defame the Mystery claimed that he was in fact a castrato, or that he had altered his voice by drinking hemlock. The initiates had arrived in the House of Hades down in the Elysian Fields at a moment of cosmic significance. The Queen was about to be delivered of a child. And the initiates, resurfacing with her through the sacred door on the ancient tabernacle, with a rapid alteration of emotions, were born again along with him. Both Elysium and Eleusis are named as the places of “Arrival,” the two separated merely on the vertical axis.

> I approached the very gates of death and set one foot on Proserpine’s threshold yet was permitted to return, borne through all the elements. At midnight I saw the sun shining as if it were noon: I entered the presence of the gods of the underworld and of the upper world, stood near and worshipped them.
>
> APULEIUS THE GOLDEN ASS, 18.

They saw Persephone in the midst of a great light with her son. Brimo and Brimos were ancient names and needed to be glossed by the source that recorded them: they are the “Mighty or Terrible Ones.” It is significant that Brimos is named as a matrilineal son, bearing his mother’s name, as in the more ancient tradition of the Goddess. The names are probably a version of a name of Dionysus as the “Thundering” Bromios. His role in the Mystery was indicated not only by his sharing the Hunting Preserve of the Huntress Artemis at Agrai as Zagreus along with Persephone’s Nysian abduction, but the initiates had carried his sacred *bakchos* branches as they walked the Sacred Road, led by him as the personification of their joyous hymn to Iakchos. Inevitably as the god of toxic plants, he as Bacchus was involved in the *narkissos* of Persephone’s ecstatic abduction. His complicity is the reason that Demeter refused a drink of red wine when she was entertained in the House of Metaneira, proposing instead the formula of the Mystery mixed potion. So too were the Erinyes, who personified the ancient and chthonic claims of mother’s right, offered no wine in sacrifices. Brimo was also one of the epithets given to the dread goddess Hekate (Hecate), patroness of pharmaceutical herbalists.

> The girl was amazed and stretched out both her hands to take the marvelous bauble. But as she did, the earth gaped open and Lord Hades, whom we all will meet, burst forth with his immortal horses into the Nysian plain. She screamed the shrill cry of a maenad. But none of the immortals nor any mortal man heard her voice, not even the olive trees that bear splendid fruit; only Hecate heard her from her cave.
>
> HOMERIC HYMN TO DEMETER VERSES 15 SQ.

> Whomever the goddesses love among men who walk the earth, he is blessed, for they soon send Plutus into his great house to live at his own hearth, Plutus who gives wealth to mortal men.

HOMERIC HYMN TO DEMETER VERSES 487 SQ.

It was the Queen of Death, both Persephone and Hecate, who were Brimo, triumphing over the chthonic experience of womanhood by bearing a son to the Lord of Death and thereby changing the Destroyer into her own and mankind's Savior. His name was Brimos, but he had other names. In the Homeric hymn he is called Ploutos (Plutus), the wealth that the vision at Eleusis assured for the initiates as their house guest, for so familiar did death become that his friendly presence maintained a constant prosperity stemming from the healthy accord between life and its sources in death. In Greek custom, one could not travel to an alien city without a proxy, someone with whom one had established a reciprocal relationship of hospitality. In Modern Greek, for example, a Proxenía is an Embassy and a Xenodoxeía is a Hotel. Just as they had received hospitality or *xenía* in the House of Hades, they could expect to receive him now as a welcomed guest in their own homes.

BLINDING OF POLYPHEMOS

Entertaining Death

IN ARISTOPHANES' *PEACE*, as the god actually enters some [illegible] house, the chorus dances an obscene parody upon the preparation of the [illegible] inebriating potion, using their bodies as mortar and pestle. The key words are the disembodied backside "eyes" of the drunken Cyclops and the puns on "bleating" (*blechomenoi*) and the pennyroyal mint (*blechon*), and the leathern Mystery pouch, filled with [illegible] wild herbs, that once was used to hide away the Gorgon head.

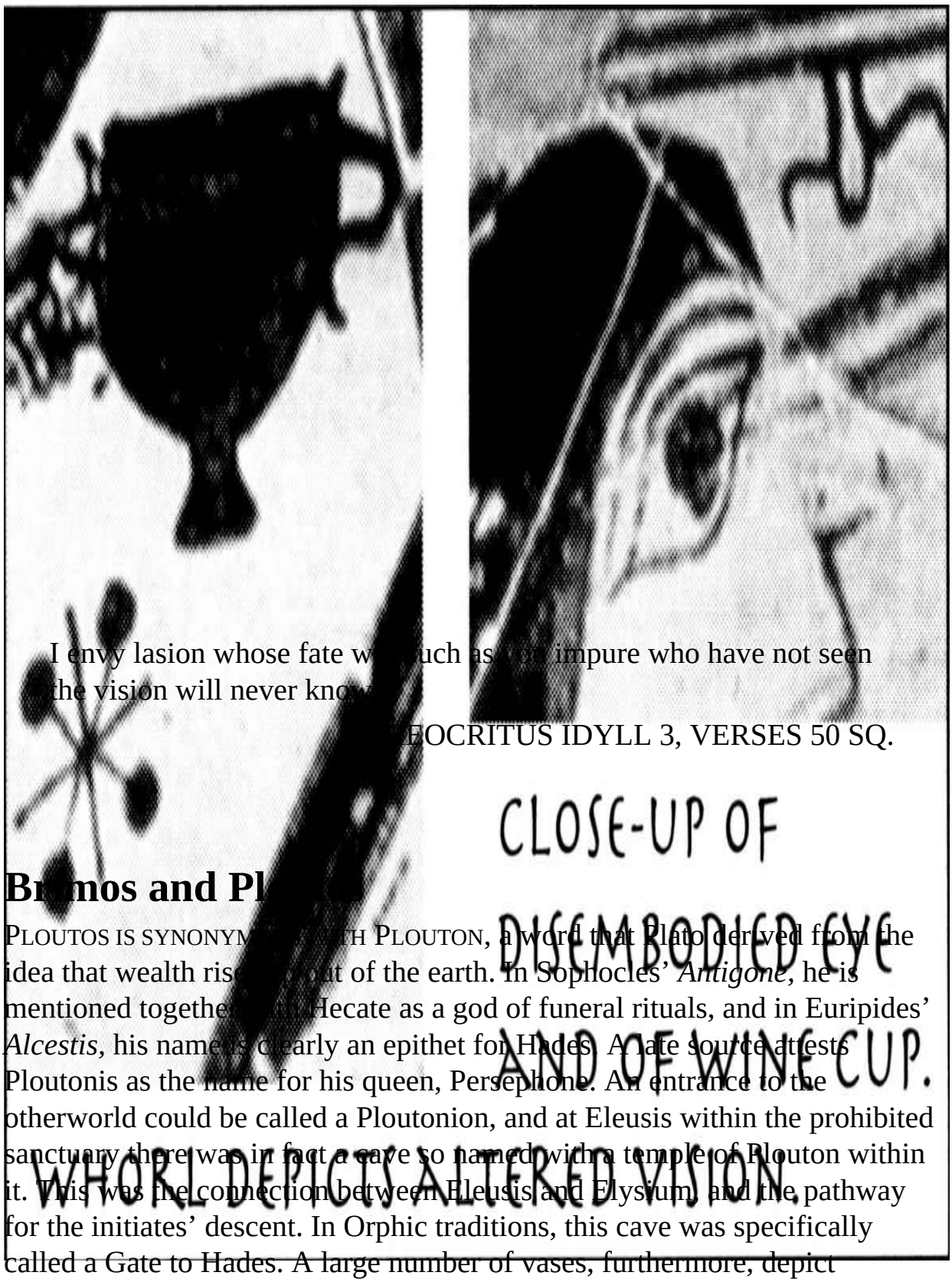
The second refrain goes on to parody the great witch Circe, who mixed the drugs that turned men into pigs. Here the key word is the "mixing," which is the verbal form of the mixed potion or Mystery *kykeon*, twice repeated. The mortar and pestle are still the same obscene apparatus, since the more immediate referent is a whore of Corinth who convinced her tricks that they were pigs and served them balls of dung to eat that she herself had kneaded in them. "So little piggies, follow your mother," says the guy swinging his backside eye. The comedy is an example of Middle Comedy, where the obscenity of the previous century gives way to a more allegorical comedy of manners, but this dance, alone in the play, preserves the old sexual abandon. It is all the more emphasized since the other choral dances

are unscripted. Ploutos has been turned into an old decrepit blind man so that he can no longer reward his wealth judiciously to those who merit it, but in the course of the comedy his sight will be restored by the man who offers him hospitality, again employing the Eleusinian theme, and the topsy-turvy world is restored to balance with wealth awarded comically to those who best deserve it.

> Karion: I will lead you like the Cyclops—thumpity-dumpity-do-do—swinging my backside eye like this. Come along, my dear little ones, crying and fleabane bleating, my herd of cattle and stinking goats, follow me with your tools out, and you will get your wine neat.
>
> Choral leader: As for us, we will seek out your backside eye—thumpity-dumpity-do-do—fleabane bleating, and getting you there all hungry for it, with your mystery pouch full of wild herbs, all dewy, raving drunk, as you lead your herd, passed out, taking our big stake, burning to plunge it into your eye.
>
> ARISTOPHANES PLOUTOS, VERSES 20 SQ.

A similar theme of *ploutos* or wealth and improved vision via an intoxicant and the offer of hospitality can be sensed in Euripides' *Electra* tragedy. Electra has been married off to a noble but impoverished farmer by her mother Clytemnestra so that she will never have a child with sufficient means to avenge the murder of her father. The farmer is notable for his hospitality, despite his meager resources. In the course of the play, his poor fare is enriched by a cup of "strong" wine from the mountain. The old servant who brings this enrichment also clarifies the vision so that Electra at last recognizes the stranger she has been entertaining as her brother Orestes. They plot together the means for their revenge. She pretends to be giving birth, and when her mother arrives, they murder her. This fantasy child is Death as her avenger. And she is given to a new husband, Pylades, whose

name means “Gate of Hades”; and the poor farmer becomes laden with wealth, Ploutos, in the homeland of his wife’s new husband.



I envy Iasion whose fate w[illegible]uch as [illegible] impure who have not seen the vision will never kno[illegible]

[illegible]EOCRITUS IDYLL 3, VERSES 50 SQ.

Br[illegible]mos and Pl[illegible]

PLOUTOS IS SYNONYM[illegible]TH PLOUTON, a word that Plato derived from the idea that wealth ris[illegible]out of the earth. In Sophocles' *Antigone*, he is mentioned together[illegible] Hecate as a god of funeral rituals, and in Euripides' *Alcestis*, his name is clearly an epithet for Hades. A late source attests Ploutonis as the name for his queen, Persephone. An entrance to the otherworld could be called a Ploutonion, and at Eleusis within the prohibited sanctuary there was in fact a cave so named with a temple of Plouton within it. This was the connection between Eleusis and Elysium, and the pathway for the initiates' descent. In Orphic traditions, this cave was specifically called a Gate to Hades. A large number of vases, furthermore, depict

Persephone’s return, often in the midst of plants and bearing an infant or a cornucopia as a symbol of wealth in her hand.

The cornucopia or “horn of plenty” is a funnel-shaped basket spilling with fruits, originally the horns of the nymph or she-goat Amalthea, flowing with nectar and ambrosia, with which she nursed the infant Zeus. When one broke off, the nymphs filled it with fruits, which is a clear indication that the fruits themselves were also psychoactive. By another account, the horn was that of the River God Acheloös, who was wrestling with Herakles for the hand of the maiden Deianeira; in this version, the horn would have phallic implications. Herakles broke it off, and to recover it, Acheloös exchanged it for Amalthea’s horn. Hence from its exterior, the horn is masculine, while its funneling interior is feminine. Persephone is depicted gathering her wild plants of Nysa into it, funneling down toward the vulva, since it is emblematic of the tunneling journey toward the point of its vortex, where it invisibly opens back out into the otherworld. Ploutos, Hades, Dionysus, and Iakchos all are also depicted with the cornucopia.

> Demeter bore Ploutos, uniting in love with the hero lasion in a fertile field plowed thrice and left fallow in her homeland of Crete.
>
> HESIOD THEOGONY VERSES 969 SQ.

> Earth brought forth the narcissus according to Zeus’s plan to please Hades, who receives all.
>
> HOMERIC HYMN TO DEMETER VERSES 8 SQ.

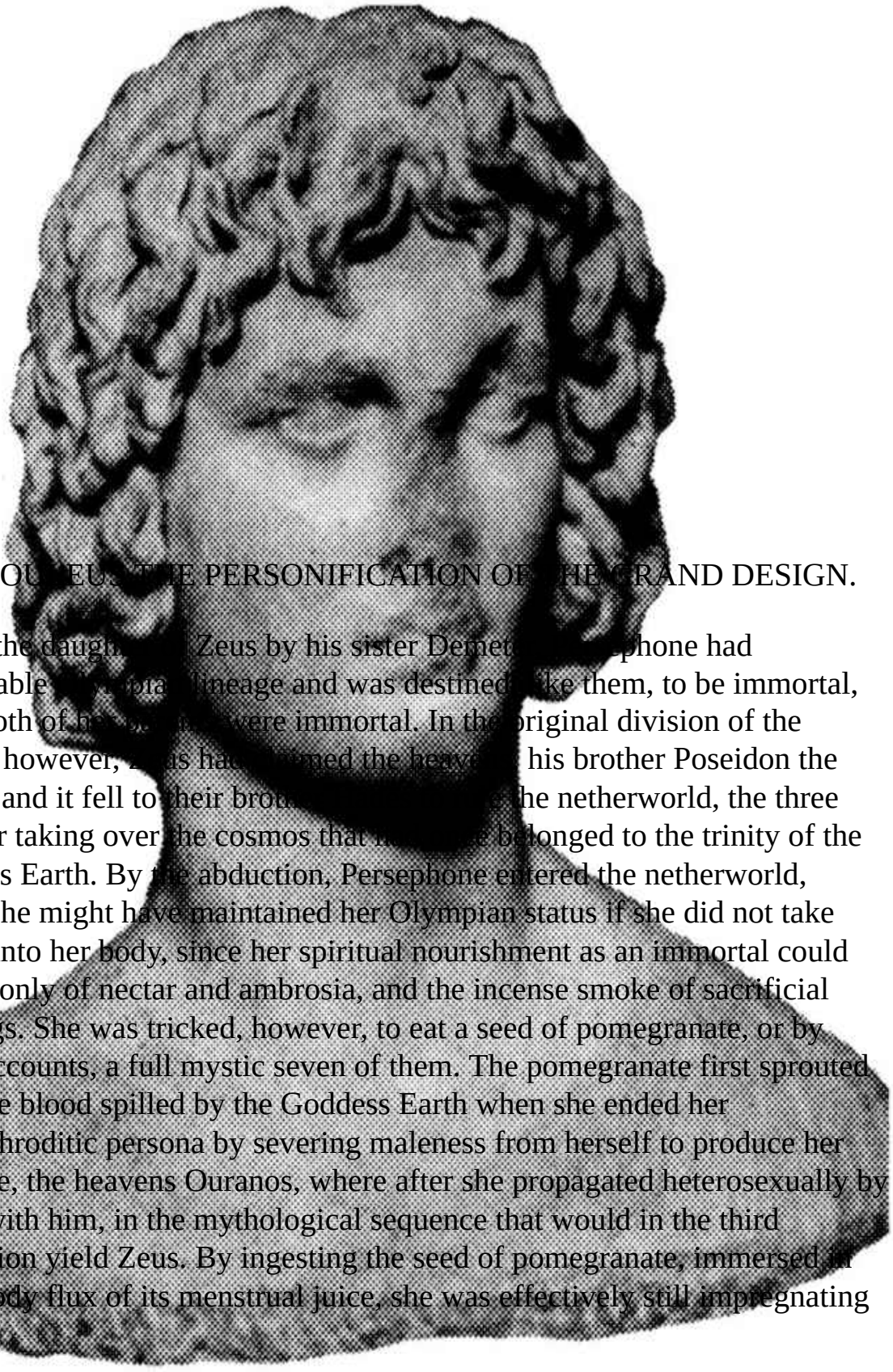
Since Demeter, Persephone, and Hecate are the traditional trio of the three stages of womanhood, it is no surprise that Demeter also was said to have given birth to Ploutos. The myth has obvious significance for the

psychotropic nature of the ritual potion, since the child's father is named as the "Drug-man." According to Homer and Hesiod, Demeter slept with lasion in Crete in a field plowed thrice and left fallow, ready to receive the seed, where she conceived Ploutos. Iasion's name, like Jason (Iason), Ion, and Iamos, means that he, too, is a man of the drug or *ios*. Thus Demeter, like her daughter Persephone, also had an ecstatic seizure, but the two differ significantly, since Demeter's drunken experience occurred not in the wilderness of Nysa, but in a field prepared for cultivation, which implies that the Eleusinian toxin was the antithesis of the former, but linked to the crop of grain. The traditions about this Iasion are complex: he was both destroyed by the thunderbolt of Zeus, but apparently came back to life, living to a grey-haired old age. He was a dwarf, apparently black and one of the Kabeiroi creatures, and the father of the ecstatic Korybantes and the founder of the Mysteries of Samothrace.

The mystery child is interchangeable with the abductor, just like the triad of his mothers. Thus Iakchos was said to be the son both of Persephone and Demeter. Brimo conceived her son Brimos from Brimos, just as Iakchos was said to be his own father.

The Grand Design

THERE WAS A CONSPIRACY AFOOT involved in the abduction of Persephone from the sisterhood in Nysa. Its object was to incorporate Death into the Grand Design. The unlikely trio was Zeus and his brother Hades, with the complicity of Earth. The narcotic flower and the ensuing abduction by Hades were in fulfillment of the Plan or Grand Design of Zeus.



EUBOULEUS: THE PERSONIFICATION OF THE GRAND DESIGN.

As the daughter of Zeus by his sister Demeter, Persephone had impeccable Olympian lineage and was destined, like them, to be immortal, since both of her parents were immortal. In the original division of the realms, however, Zeus had claimed the heavens, his brother Poseidon the waters, and it fell to their brother Hades to rule the netherworld, the three together taking over the cosmos that had once belonged to the trinity of the Goddess Earth. By the abduction, Persephone entered the netherworld, where she might have maintained her Olympian status if she did not take matter into her body, since her spiritual nourishment as an immortal could consist only of nectar and ambrosia, and the incense smoke of sacrificial offerings. She was tricked, however, to eat a seed of pomegranate, or by some accounts, a full mystic seven of them. The pomegranate first sprouted from the blood spilled by the Goddess Earth when she ended her hermaphroditic persona by severing maleness from herself to produce her opposite, the heavens Ouranos, where after she propagated heterosexually by union with him, in the mythological sequence that would in the third generation yield Zeus. By ingesting the seed of pomegranate, immersed in the bloody flux of its menstrual juice, she was effectively still impregnating herself.

> ‘I will not make so bad a husband for you amongst the immortals; after all, I am Zeus’s own brother.’ He said that and Persephone rejoiced and quickly, jumped up from her throne in glee. But he, himself, gave her in secret a sweet pomegranate seed to eat so that she might not remain forever with her mother, the awesome Demeter whose robe is a deep purple.
>
> HOMERIC HYMN TO DEMETER VERSES 363 SQ.

By the seed, she sullied her celestial purity and became pregnant, and as the wedded wife of Hades she passed into the control of his House. Thereafter she was an in-law of the Olympians and she and her mother were frequent visitors. The marital alliance stabilized the cosmos, incorporating the netherworld into the Grand Design, not unlike the Incarnation of Christ, which similarly was intended to open up the passageway between the realms through the Blessed Virgin’s intercession, or at least that is how it turned out as Christianity assimilated its pagan antecedents. The celestial realm and that of the netherworld had established the proper diplomatic channels of *proxenía* for civilized relationships with the humans, who as both spirit and flesh, belong to both jurisdictions. From the seed she gave birth to the Mystery Child. Persephone is a transmuted or pacified version of the Death Goddess Perse, who was also the Goddess of Renewable Life; her name as Persephone means that she has “Supplanted Perse.”

The child was the pacification of Death. In the Ploutonion Cave at Eleusis, he was portrayed as the personification of the “Plan” or Grand Design, given the name of Eubouleus. Instead of some kind of deathly monstrosity, he is a handsome totally Hellenized adolescent.

Demeter and Demophoön

AFTER RECEIVING HOSPITALITY in the House of the Eleusinian Queen Metaneira, Demeter is engaged to nurse the prince Demophoön, the “Vox Populi,” born when his mother had given up all hope of bearing another child. Demeter’s manner of tending him, however, is bizarre. Just as

Persephone should receive no material sustenance in the netherworld, Demeter intends to keep the child pure. She boasts of her pharmaceutical expertise as befits her disguise as a crone, like Hekate, namely her knowledge of all the powerful great herbs that are gathered and the talisman plant that wards off possession, some cut for the root, others for the stalk, but she fed him not on mother's milk, but upon ambrosia, the food of the gods, breathing her divine breath into him.

> The child flourished and grew like a god, for he fed not on mother's milk, but upon ambrosia, the food of gods, with which Demeter anointed him - anointed as if born a god himself; and she inspired him with her breath sweetly as she rocked him in her lap.
>
> HOMERIC HYMN TO DEMETER VERSES 235 SQ.

And each night, she buried him in the fire on the hearth, to burn away the flesh of his mortality. The child thrived, like a miraculous prodigy; he appeared divine. But one night, his mother in secret witnessed the ritual, and not understanding it, she shrieked with horror, thinking that the goddess was taking her child away from her. As indeed she was, for in making him immortal, she would have deprived him of his netherworld mother.

> The goddess would have made him ageless and immortal had it not been for the folly of Metaneira, his own mother. 'That woman, a guest in my house–dear Demophooön–she is burying you in a great fire and she leaves it to me to mourn and bear the pain of grief.'
>
> HOMERIC HYMN TO DEMETER VERSES 242 SQ.

Demeter renounces the child, throwing him down on the hearth and consigning him to a mortal existence, but she grants him special favor, inasmuch as he has lain in her arms.

In commemoration of Demophoön, each year at the Mystery, a youth chosen from an aristocratic Athenian family and called the boy from the hearth was initiated at public expense. There were numerous statues of these youths, identified as a Herakles, in the sanctuary, and eventually also of girls. The cost of such an initiation was considerable, fifteen drachmas, plus incidental expenses as tips for the guides and the price of the sacrificed pig, coming to about a month and a half's wages for a workingman, but obviously the aristocratic family of the boy from the hearth would have had no problem coming up with the fee. The Demophoön boy as a Herakles was the public voice's way of accepting the prototypic hero's ambiguous loss of immortality and the lot of humankind's cycles of death and transfiguration. The requirement that the boy be from a well-born family probably indicates that he was a token sacrificial offering.

Triptolemos

DEMETER NEXT COMMANDS THE BUILDING of the first temple on the site at Eleusis, just above the well of the Beautiful Dancing, exactly where it is today, There she sat, vowing that if her daughter, like her failed nursling Demophoön, must die, then everything must join her in death through a plague of sterility that visits all the plants of the land, causing famine.

> Then she made a deadly year for mankind. Withering the soil that is so nourishing, and Earth would not send up seeds because Demeter kept them hidden. In vain the oxen pulled the curved plowshare.
>
> HOMERIC HYMN TO DEMETER VERSES 305 SQ.

The celestial deities implore Demeter to leave Eleusis and relinquish her chthonic intentions as a goddess of death, for she belongs with them in

eternal life. The gods fear mankind will soon be extinct, with all men in the realm of Hades; if that were to happen, the delicate balance between the celestial and chthonic worlds would be offset and the gods of the sky would have no humans left to perform the essential ritual of the sacrificial meal. Demeter relents only when Zeus agrees to send back Persephone. Like a maenad in her joy, Demeter rejoins her daughter but learns that, like the earth where she has been, Persephone has accepted some few seeds and thus belongs to both worlds, forced to return with the seasons to her husband's land of death. Demeter signifies her consent to this recurrent separation by causing the grain, which has lain infertile in the womb of the earth on the Rarian plain, to germinate, growing toward the time of harvest when the seed will wave in the celestial air.

And she inaugurated the Mystery to assuage her wrath over the fate of Demophoön. What was this wrath? Simply that the first solution of separating the realms had failed; as soon as she learns what had happened simultaneously with her daughter as she returns sullied by the seed of pomegranate, Demeter taught the rites of the Mystery. Its essence is the acceptance of the toxic blooms as relatives of the edible foods, and the dependence of cultivated foodstuffs upon the pacification of their primitive antecedents.

> Behold all flesh is as grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field.
>
> ISAIAH 40.6

The numerous miracle children are named severally as Brimos, Ploutos, Iakchos, Zagreus, Eubouleus, and Demophoön, but they are all merely aspects of the same entity under different epithets, like the many names later accorded to the Virgin. Thus Zagreus became implicated in the metaphor of the Hunting Preserve, although the initial part of his name is probably not the intensive idea of "great," supposedly a dialectal variant of *dia / za,* but it is rather to be traced to *zeia* and similar words for "grain," going back to

Sanskrit *yava* for “barley” and occurring in the Greek verb for life itself as *zaein.* The conjunction of the hunt and the grain, however, is indicated by *zagre,* which is glossed by the Byzantine lexicographer Hesychius as a “pitfall” for hunting wild beasts, an idea that has additional connotations of the “grave trench” or the “pit for chthonic offerings.” The final apotheosis of the miracle child went by the title of Triptolemos, the “Threefold Warrior.” He was the one to whom Demeter taught the Mystery of Life and Death and the cultivation of the barley.

> Then she went forth to the kings who administer justice, Triptolemus and Diocles, who drives horses, and mighty Eumolpus and Celeus, the leader of his people. To them, she showed the performance of her rites and taught her Mysteries—holy rites that are awesome, that no one may transgress not reveal nor express in words, for an overwhelming reverence for the gods stops his voice.
>
> HOMERIC HYMN TO DEMETER VERSES 473 SQ.

The precise identity of this Triptolemos was part of the Eleusinian secret, for the traveler Pausanias, who always showed a interest in local traditions, tells us that he intended to write further about the various accounts of Triptolemos’ parentage but was warned by a vision in a dream when he visited Eleusis to say no more. By one account, Triptolemos was said to have been the son of Raros, after whom the Rarian plain was named. It was in the Rarian plain that Triptolemos sowed the first grain crop. From there he traveled throughout the world, flying in a chariot drawn by serpents. His gospel was the reborn seed, the barley or *alphi,* a word that can be traced to a formulaic conjunction in Indo-European for the food from cultivation as opposed to the natural food, *meli* or “honey.” It was there also that Baubo lived with her husband Dysaules, an inauspicious name indicating that he is a version of the netherworld’s Lord of the “Unfortunate Domicile.” An Orphic tradition confirms this parentage by making Baubo his mother.

> The seed thou sowest cometh not to life except first it die.
>
> PAUL I CORINTHIANS 15. 36

Orphism, like Eleusis, had a visionary sacrament, apparently a psychoactive thymiaterion or censer, rather than a potion. Such an incense was appropriate inasmuch as Orphic dogma seems to have differed primarily in the emphasis placed upon the sinfulness of man's corporeal nature from which the Mystery redeemed its adherents, whereas the Eleusinian religion aimed more at maintaining a ritualized compact between this world and its source and goal in the other. Thus the Orphics also followed a dietary regime as well, not only being vegetarians in order to minimize the somatic nature of their incarnation, but they also avoided certain foods that had connotations of the netherworld, in order eventually to attain a spiritual and celestial existence.

> Go on, boast and hawk your vegetarian diet: get ecstatic with Orpheus as your Lord on the smoke prescribed in his Holy Scriptures.
>
> EURIPIDES HIPPOLYTUS, VERSES 951 SQ.

Triptolmos was a brother of Eubouleus; they and their other brothers were all herdsmen of various types, tending sheep, cows and pigs; and Eubouleus and Triptolemos are probably interchangeable since they both sometimes are the swineherds who lost some of their pigs down the cleft in the earth that opened to receive Persephone when she was abducted. Eubouleus is a doublet for Euboulos, under which name he is the son of Demeter from her affair with Iasion, and hence he was identical with Ploutos, which would imply that Triptolemos was also a version of Ploutos.

Since all these names are in the nature of epithets, the merging of the various personae is understandable. The theme of cattle-theft, moreover, is formulaic in Indo-European contexts involving the sacred drug: the cows and the other herds are always ecstatically in their estrus, like the cow-maiden Io, prodded by their herder with the goad of the gad-fly called “estrus.”

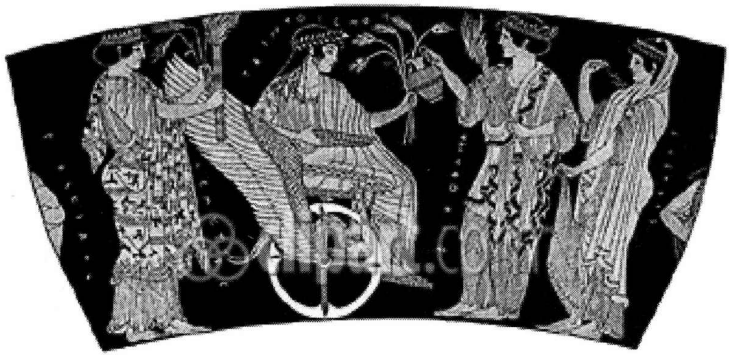
The barley for the Eleusinian ceremonies was specially grown in the Rarian plain and threshed upon the floor of Triptolemos. It and the wild pennyroyal were the only two ingredients added to the water in mixing the *kykeon* potion.

Both Raros and the Rarian plain are unusual words in Greek: the only other word in Greek that has an initial unaspirated rho is *raros,* a word found only in ancient grammarians, where it is glossed as meaning “belly, embryo, aborted fetus, infant, and mighty,” all fitting the persona of Baubo and the miraculous being emerging through her vulva.

In a 5th-century Athenian tragedy, Triptolemos had a half-brother whose father was Poseidon, who apparently must have slept with Baubo. It is a common theme in Myth that brothers are linked by their dissimilarity, often even as twins, with different fathers, who opposed each other while still in the womb. Since Triptolemos is associated with the resurrected grain, it is appropriate that his darker self be expressed as a sibling with a chthonic father. An early historian in fact claimed that the father of Triptolemos was Ocean and that he therefore was himself identical with his supposed half-brother. Triptolemos had a son who bore the name of the saffron-man Krokon, a pattern that similarly expresses his dichotomous relationship with the planted grain’s wild antecedents. By still other accounts, again he figures, like the grape cluster Staphylos and his father Dionysus, as the next generation in botanical evolution, for he may actually be the son of the saffron-man, in which case he named his own son, as was the custom, after the child’s grandfather, since one tended to avoid naming a child after a still-living relative. In this genealogy, the mother of Triptolemos was Saisara: in a “drunken” stupor, she slept with her husband, who now is named as the eponymous Eleusinius, who like Raros lent his name to the place.

Thus, the “Triple Warrior” Triptolemos is interchangeable with the “Grand Design” Eubouleus and Euboulos, “Wealth” Ploutos; and the “Joyous Cry” Iakchos; and they all are essentially pacified versions of Hades, hence identical with the Mystery Child Brimos. His parents, too, are

interchangeable as Brimo, Sairara, Krokos, lasion, Baubo. Dysaules, Poseidon (probably as the mate of the Gorgon Medusa), Raros, and Eleusinius, and probably also Metaneira and Keleus. What was it that Pausanias refrained from disclosing?



TRIPTOLEMOS, WITH IAKCHOS BEHIND AND DEMETER AND PERSEPHONE IN FRONT; PERSEPHONE VEILED AS A BRIDE, AND DEMETER POURING THE POTION.

> At that time Eleusis was inhabited by aborigines, whose names were Baubo, Dysaules, Triptolemos, and also Eumolpus and Eubouleus. Triptolemos was a herdsman, Eumolpus a shepherd, and Eubouleus a swineherd.
>
> CLEMENT, BISHOP OF ALEXANDRIA, EXHORTATION TO THE GREEKS, 11, 12 SQ.

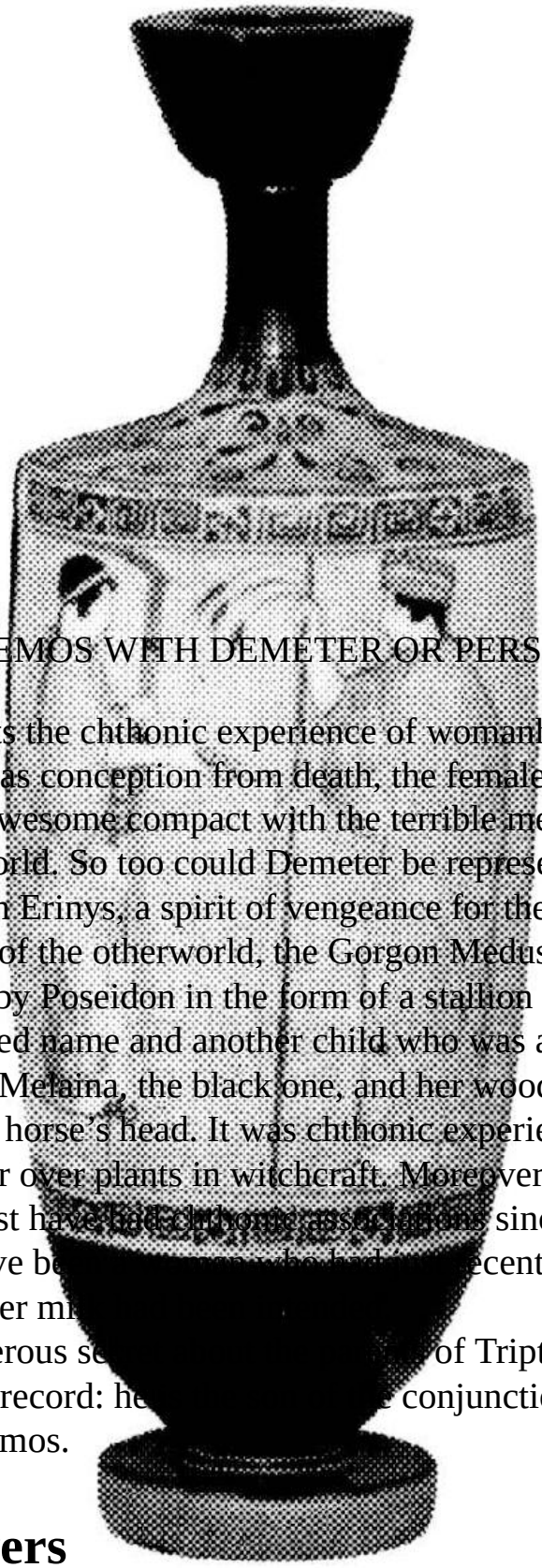
The Trinity of the Goddess

TRIPTOLEMOS WAS THE CHILD of the reunited trinity of the Goddesses, maiden, mother, and crone, subsumed in the single figure of tri-morphous Hekate, a female depicted as early as the 5th century with three bodies back to back, all maiden, although she is herself the post-menopausal crone and wet nurse or *kourotrophos.* She shared her epithet of *trimorphos* with none other than Brimo herself. These are the three roles that pass between Persephone and

Demeter as they progress though the stages of the sacred myth, culminating with Hekate becoming the constant companion of Persephone as she lives out her life journeying between the two realms.

It was said, in fact, that Hekate, like Persephone, was a daughter of Demeter. The male companion of the tri-morphous Goddess was traditionally similarly triple to match her trinity, either creatures with three heads or a triple body. Thus also in the mythical transition from goddess to god, three brothers, Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades, were required to take over the cosmos, but only in the third generation, moving from Ouranos to Kronos, and finally Zeus. Christianity perpetuated the pattern by the Holy Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

DEMETER AND PERSEPHONE WITH TRIPTOLEMOS



TRIPTOLEMOS WITH DEMETER OR PERSEPHONE.

Hekate represents the chthonic experience of womanhood, marriage as death and maternity as conception from death, the female's ancient religious power through her awesome compact with the terrible metaphysical sources of life in the otherworld. So too could Demeter be represented in her chthonic aspect as an Erinys, a spirit of vengeance for the lost maiden. Like another great queen of the otherworld, the Gorgon Medusa, she was said to have been mounted by Poseidon in the form of a stallion and to have borne a daughter with a sacred name and another child who was a horse. In Phigalia, Demeter was called Melaina, the black one, and her wooden cult effigy portrayed her with a horse's head. It was chthonic experience also that gave the female her power over plants in witchcraft. Moreover, psychologically, the role of nurse must have had chthonic associations since the wet nurse would ordinarily have b ecently lost the child of her own for whom her mi

This is the dangerous s of Triptolemos that Pausanias dared not record: he conjunction of the three goddesses. He is Brimos.

Sons and Lovers

WHAT WE ARE NEVER TOLD is that Triptolemos was a child of the two Eleusinian goddesses. His iconography, however, does seem to suggest that role for him. The loss of the abduction of the maiden is restored by the birth of the daughter; but also by the birthing of a son, in which form the persona of the male abductor returns home, no longer alien blood, but assimilated as the son of the mother. The divine son and the abductor become the same persona. Inevitably, as the child of the reunited Trinity, Triptolemos is the son of Persephone, at least the grandson, therefore, of Demeter, but more probably also the son of Demeter, making him the brother of Persephone.

> Then to them came Hecate, who wears a delicate veil and she also caressed the daughter of holy Demeter and from that time on, Lady Hecate was the servant and companion of Persephone.
>
> HOMERIC HYMN TO DEMETER VERSES 438 SQ.

He is seen on the great Eleusinian bas-relief in the Athens National Museum as the divine child in adolescence, ambiguously both the son and the lover of the two adoring goddesses. Or he wears the crown of his royal rank on a *lekythos* vase as he stands opposite his Queen Persephone, unless perhaps she is Demeter.

On another vase, Persephone sits in Hades holding the ears of grain that will be her redemption. Consistently, the proselytizing mission of Triptolemos is presented as analogous to that of Dionysus, as they both travel throughout the world on winged chariots drawn by serpents, spreading their respective gospels of the vine plant and the grain. The message of Triptolemos is the ultimate mediation with the earth through the art of cultivation.

Thus, the ambiguously doubled roles for the figures in the Eleusinian myth make Persephone and Triptolemos into redemptive lovers, sibling offspring of the same mother, for thus the mother appropriates to herself the identity of the abductor as her own son and negates the psychological trauma of the original encounter at Agrai. The theme of a sibling union as preferable

to alien blood is reflected in the tragic literature. Thus Antigone in Sophocles' play joins with her dead brother in a union of kindred blood, a marriage to Hades that is preferable to her forthcoming nuptials to blood that is not kindred but simply blood in the person of Creon's son Haimon, upon whose name as "blood" (as in hematology) the poet puns. Instead of mingling his blood with Antigone, he is left at the altar of Death covered with his own unwanted blood. The pattern can be traced back to Mycenaean-Minoan traditions, where the two goddesses collaborate in the birth of the divine male child.

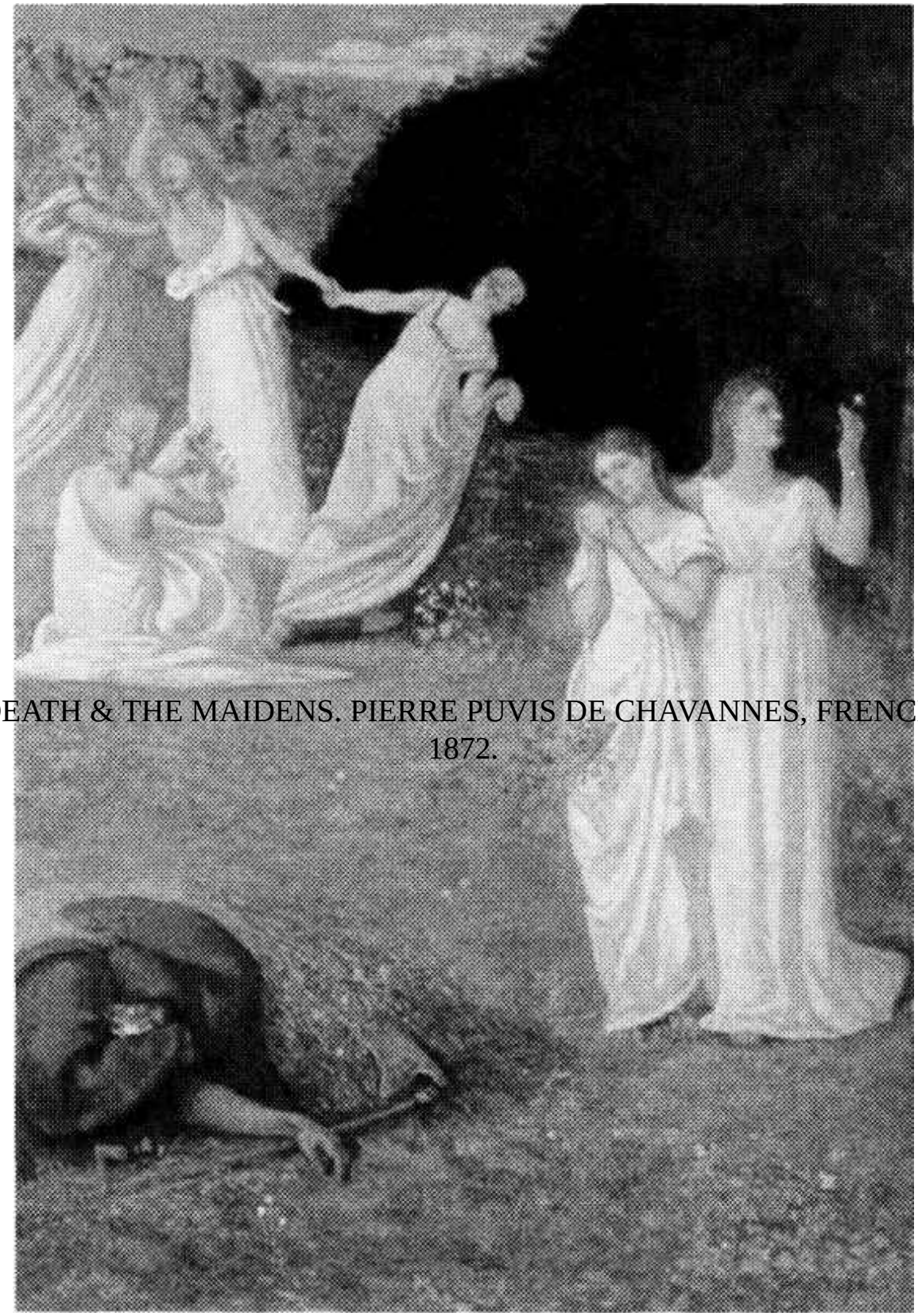
> 'They are dead, and the living are the cause of their death.' 'Who was the killer and who the one laid low?' 'Haimon, the blood-man, is dead, and with his own hand, he was covered in blood.'
>
> SOPHOCLES ANTIGONE, VERSES 1173 SQ.

So too in Euripides' *Iphigeneia amongst the Taurians*, the heroine is rescued from the consequences of her marriage to Death by her brother Orestes and his constant companion, who is her future mate, Pylades or the Gate of Hades. The theme can be traced as well in the two Electra plays, one by Euripides and the other by Sophocles, where Electra in both escapes from enforced sterility and a grievous domicile in the ambience of Hades by her union with her sibling and his silent darker companion, who will become her mate.

Death and the Maidens

LIKE THE FRANZ SCHUBERT SONG "Death and the Maiden," written in 1817, Puvis's painting addresses the themes of the fragility of youth and the inevitability of death. The female figures at the top of the painting seem to dance precariously on the edge of a cliff. Two other young women stand on the right, one blowing on a dandelion, the other gazing thoughtfully into space—her face is turned toward the dark-cloaked figure of the Grim

Reaper, lurking ominously among the cut flowers. Although its theme is the transience of human life, Puvis's picture, with its pale colors and static poses, has all the monumentality of a fresco; in fact Puvis painted decorations for many public buildings in France and elsewhere, including the public library in Boston



DEATH & THE MAIDENS. PIERRE PUVIS DE CHAVANNES, FRENCH, 1872.

10

The Goddess Restored

SUFFERING MAY BE NATURALLY A WOMAN'S BIOLOGICAL LOT, even apart from the deprivation imposed upon her in a society that is dominated by males. All humans are born from a woman, inevitably nourished by the material substance of her body while still within the womb, a demanding and rapidly growing fetal nucleus which, if not attended to, will threaten the mother's ever more depleted life sustenance. It again threatens its mother at the potentially painful crisis of its birthing. And then again, still further, the continued task of tending the dependant and helpless child through its sojourn in infancy, this, too, restricts and limits a woman's activity and life even if the mother is supported by a sympathetic and empathetic communal sisterhood. These joys of motherhood – for they are that, too (the bonding with other women, the triumph of creation) – these are what lie for women beyond the threshold of puberty.

Death and the Maiden

THAT THRESHOLD, MOREOVER, is, at best, for a female more psychologically confusing. Puberty for the male is liberating and ultimately pleasurable, but menstruation, with its disturbing regularity and unpredictable shifts in mood, and the initial frightful flux of blood, ties the woman closer to Nature, and to other women, especially in societies where they dwell together and synchronize their estrus, all in step with the cycles of the moon and the corresponding ebb and flow of the seas, which can only serve to authenticate their empathetic sympathy with the natural world. Psychologically, every marriage is a death, but in more rigidly structured societies, it was a journey, like Persephone's, synonymous with the death of her former identity in maidenhood as she quite literally was removed from her former activities

and the shared companionship with other maidens, like the Daughters of Ocean, as she passed into the captivity of her new keeper's House.

Since Ocean was thought to surround the inhabited world, he and his daughters mark the far boundary beyond which lay the otherworld. It is for this reason that Persephone's companions are so named as she plucked the *narkissos* in the meadow of Nysa. In Aeschylus' *Prometheus,* Ocean and his daughters visit the hero in bondage at the far edge of the world just before he descends into Hades; and the presence of these visitors again suggests an herbal context, for the fire that Prometheus stole, as we have seen, was hidden in the "narcotic-container" of the narthex.

Examples abound in Greek literature associating the water journey with transport to another world. The maiden's marriage to death is the preliminary for the voyage to Troy in the *lphigeneia* tragedies of Euripides, just as the similar death of Polyxena on Achilles' tomb is needed to rouse the wind that will carry the Trojan women to Greece into their foreign captivity in the *Hecuba.*

Nor was it proper even, at least in polite society, for conception to be anything more than a duty demanded of the females in a patriarchy, where ideally the father, with previous sexual experience and closer homoerotic attachments, took to wife a girl, younger and still naïve about eroticism, a girl who would henceforth live in his house, dominated by him, and by the senior women of the household, most likely his still living mother. She came with her own property in the form of the dowry, like a payment for her upkeep, but she surrendered personal control of it to her master.

The maiden phase of the marital abduction and the dangerous crises of motherhood thus are bridged through suffering, and motherhood, for all its rewards, is still further suffering. To survive it all was neither easy nor certain. The frequent hazardous birthing often proved sorrowful, as well, when the baby was stillborn or was an unwanted female. The mother's own supernumerary dishonored daughters were rejected by their father and discarded, left to die, or to be reared by someone else for a slavish life as professional prostitute outside the citizenry.

> Of all things that have life and sense, we women are the most hapless creatures; first we must buy a husband at a great price with our dowry. And yet they say we live secure at home, while they are at the wars. I would gladly take my stand in battle three times over, than once give birth.
>
> EURIPIDES MEDEA, VERSES 230 SQ.

But the two ambiguously joyous, but pathetic personae do not complete the archetype of the female's experience. For the male, there is no clear age when ejaculation definitively ceases, but for the woman there lies ahead the trauma of menopause, an additional physiological threshold, liberating, perhaps, but with still more suffering from Nature in uncontrollable moodiness and a sense of depletion. But this was a woman's lot.

And it also was her pathway to ascendancy. In the household, if she endured long enough, she might eventually replace her mother-in-law and become the new fearful female power there. And in Nature, the reward was to profit at last from a life of suffering that had been lived so near the edge and close to Nature: to be wise now in the knowledge of Nature, to use it as her weapon, in later terminology, to be a *wicca,* a wise woman (cognate with "wisdom") or *sabia,* as she is called in Spanish, a role from the pre-Christianized Europe that pejoratively, and fearfully, was termed a witch. Across this second threshold of menopause was the third persona that united them all together as a fearsome triad, the power of the crone or pharmacist witch, the *pharmakís,* and the wet nurse or *kourotrophós,* who through suffering has ascended to the old supremacy of the Goddess. When Demeter loses her daughter, this is the role that next falls to her lot.

The maidens and mothers and post-menopausal crones are the traditional groupings as the women convened in the maenadic revel to revert to the powers of the Goddess lost in the transition to male dominance, for in the religious realm, they were still indispensable. The same trinity was joined together in the Eleusinian reunion of Persephone and Demeter into the mysterious triad with the third goddess Hekate, as Brimo and Baubo.

Hekate was the “Willful” one, the fanciful etymology of her name as the one who now can get her own way, the fearful goddess to be found wherever three roads met and whose appropriate offering was a dog, not cooked and eaten, but simply left to rot. At the branching of the road, a possible destination was downward. It was best not to even mention Hekate when one spoke of the benevolence of the other two.

Hekabe, Queen of Troy

THIS SORROWFUL PATHWAY to ascendancy is the theme in Euripides’ *Hecuba* tragedy, or *Hekabe* as is its title in Greek, allowing a pun upon Hekate. The glory of motherhood is in the plurality of offspring, but the more children there are, the more vulnerable is the mother to the sorrow of losing them. Hekabe, the Queen of Troy, has had fifty children, but with the fall of her citadel, she was left with only three, her daughters Polyxena and Kassanda and a son Polydoros, the heir apparent to a resurgent Troy. The Greeks are stranded in Thrace awaiting a wind for their return, and they learn that they must sacrifice Polyxena to the tomb of Achilles. Hekabe sees this first in a terrifying clairvoyant dream and emerges from her tent on all fours like an animal. Despite her pleas, Polyxena is led off to her death; and as the captive women of Troy fetch water for her burial, they discover that Polydoros, who had been entrusted for safe-keeping to a Thracian ally Polymnestor, has washed ashore, murdered for his horde of Trojan treasure by his supposed protector. Hekabe thus finds herself with two corpses on stage: a duo of dead kindred blood, brother and sister. The sibling couple becomes the platform for her terrible vengeance.

She plots her revenge in a most bizarre way. In order to bide time, she entreats Agamemnon to delay the sailing, telling him that if he grants her this favor, her daughter Kassandra, who is now his concubine, will be more compliant in bed with him. This is indeed a strangely unethical ploy on her part, namely to use Kassandra’s abduction as a first step in her revenge. The successful supplication of Agamemnon, in fact, is a choreographic counterpoise to her earlier attempt to enlist the help of Odysseus; in that case she was rebuffed and now the same actor who played Odysseus fairly begs her to name her price. This would have been a major element in the tragedy’s

enactment since the act of supplication was an elaborate ritual gesture, thus visually contrasting the rebuffed supplication with the solicited version.

She then entices Polymnestor with his two sons into her tent, the same one where she had experienced her nightmare, but now it is she and the other women who orchestrate the nightmare. While the maidens enact an inversion of their role as abducted concubines by seducing Polymnestor, until he finds himself immobilized as their prisoner, the women who have experienced childbirth, equally enact a sinister reversal of their pathetic persona: they lovingly fondle the sons, moving them to the other side of the tent, where they then murder them before their father's sight, before next putting out his eyes. Their supremacy is brought about by an inversion of their pathetic roles, each as maidens or mothers. And this time, it is her afflicter Polymnestor who emerges on all fours, now blinded after witnessing the horrible nightmare she has orchestrated for him within the tent.

The final apotheosis of Hekabe as the "Willful Goddess" is predicted by the blind Polymnestor, whose loss of sight has made him clairvoyant: she will climb the mast of the ship on her way to Greece as captive and fall to her death at a place called Dog's Tomb. There she will pass on into the netherworld where she will join the pack of dogs led by Hekate herself, like a Fury or Erinys, tracking down those who have dishonored the rights of motherhood. She will have employed her own persona as a mater dolorosa and the abduction of her daughters Polyxena and Kassandra, as well as the death of her son Polydoros, to inflict her revenge upon Polymnestor. Polyxena's name designates her as the great "Ambassador" Proxenos or guest friend, while Polymnestor is the great chthonic abductor and "Suitor." As for Polydoros, he connotes the great "Gift" of wealth or Ploutos, hidden, supposedly, inside Hekabe's tent.

PRIEST OF DIONSYSUS (MIDDLE)

Translation by Blaise Daniel Staples

11

The Sacred Myth

THERE WAS A LARGE CORPUS of ancient Greek poetry that originally was unwritten. These poems were the performances of the many, many generations of storytellers who were adept at perpetuating the oral history of the culture. Although each performance was supposed to be unchanged from the numerous times the story had been told in the past, since there was no written script, the stories inevitably differed somewhat with each new performance. When the art of writing in the new Greek alphabet was invented, somewhere about the later part of the 8th century BCE, many of these performances were transcribed into writing. Since they all had a similarity of style, derived from the techniques of memory and recall, they were ascribed to a supposed poet called Homer. There was no Homer. He was merely the persona that possessed each new teller of the tale. His name means that he was a “hostage” of the goddesses who were the daughters of Memory, the Muses. Many of these performances were written down and existed in antiquity, but only two complete poems have survived, the *Iliad*, which tells of the War at Troy, and the *Odyssey*, which tells of the return home of one of the warriors at that war. The tellers of these tales were also sometimes called upon to perform for specific occasions. The *Hymn to Demeter* is one of these, probably sung at the sanctuary of Eleusis, but not part of the Mystery initiation. It tells of the events that led to the institution of the Mystery.

The Title

LET ME TELL YOU THE STORY OF DEMETER, the holy goddess whose hair grew in rich plaits as only a goddess's does, and of her daughter, whom Hades seized. Zeus, the thunder god, gave her to him. This is how it happened.

Prelude in nysa

SHE WAS PLAYING FAR FROM DEMETER, lady of the harvest who reaps with a golden sickle, gathering flowers with the daughters of Ocean, roses and crocus and beautiful violets, iris, hyacinths, and the narcissus. Earth brought forth the narcissus as a wonderful lure for the blossoming girl according to Zeus's plan to please Hades, who receives all. It was an object of awe for all to see, both the immortal gods and mortal men. And from its root grew a hundred heads, smelling a smell so sweet that the whole broad sky above and all the earth laughed and the salty swell of the sea.

The girl was amazed and stretched out both her hands to take the marvelous bauble. But as she did, the earth gaped open and Lord Hades, whom we all will meet, burst forth with his immortal horses into the Nysian plain, Lord Hades, the son of Cronus who is called by many names. Begging for pity and fighting him off, she was dragged into his golden chariot. She screamed the shrill cry of a maenad, calling father Zeus, Zeus the highest and the best. But none of the immortals nor any mortal man heard her voice, not even the olive trees that produce splendid fruit; only Hecate, who wears a delicate veil, Persaeus's kindly daughter, heard her from her cave – and Lord Helius, the brilliant son of Hyperion, he too heard the girl's cries to her father. But the son of Cronus was sitting far from the gods in his temple, a temple thronged with worshippers. And as he received sacrifice from mortal men, she was being carried off at his suggestion by his own brother, the one who rules over many and receives all, the son of Cronus who has many names, Hades, and his immortal horses.

As long as the maiden goddess could still see the earth and the starry skies, the sea that ebbs and the rays of the sun, she could still hope to join her beloved mother and the race of the gods who will always be. And that hope consoled her in her misery. The peaks of the mountains resounded with her immortal voice, and the depths of the sea, until at last her mother heard her cries. So bitter was the pain that seized the goddess's heart, that she tore

from her head a gossamer veil, the veil that covered her divine hair, and threw over her shoulders a great black cloak, the mantle of death.

The Union with Hecate

SHE FLEW SWIFT AS A BIRD over land and sea, seeking her daughter, but no one wanted to tell her the truth: no god nor any mortal man; nor did any bird come to her and we all know birds bear true messages. So for nine days, holy Deo roamed over the earth, carrying blazing torches in her hands, and so great was her grief that she refused the taste of ambrosia and sweet nectar and shunned the bath. But when dawn arrived bearing light for the tenth day, Hecate met her, holding a flame in her hand and bringing her a message—she told her this tale:

> *Great Demeter, Goddess who brings in the seasons and gives splendid gifts, who of the heavenly gods or mortal men took Persephone and has broken your heart? I have come to you because I heard a cry, but I did not see with my own eyes who took her-here is all I know.*

The Revelation of Helius

SO SAID HECATE, but the daughter of Rhea, Demeter whose hair grew in rich plaits as only a goddess's does, did not answer her with words; instead she swiftly flew with her, carrying blazing torches in her hands. They sped straight to Helius, the sun, watchman of the gods and of men, and standing in front of his horses, Demeter, goddess among goddesses, said:

> *Helius, since we both are gods, you must help me, if ever in word or deed I warmed your heart and soul. I bore a daughter, a beautiful child with beautiful face, whose cries I heard through the uncharted skies, the cries of a captive—although I did not see anything with my own eyes. But you, because you see everything beneath with your divine rays, everything on land and sea, you must tell me the truth. Did you see my child anywhere? Who has taken her from me against her will? Was it a god or some mortal man?*

She said that. And the son of Hyperion answered her by saying:

Lady Demeter, doubter of Rhea whose hair grows in rich plaits as only a goddess's does, you will know the truth, since I stand in awe of you and pity you for how you suffer over the loss of your child. Zeus alone of the immortals is to blame, for he gave her to Hades, his own brother, to have for his wife. Seizing her, he led her to the sunless west, and her screams were shrill as a maenad's. But, Goddess, cease your great lament; you need not have such wrath: Aidoneus, the ruler of many, is your own brother and is not an unfitting husband among the immortals for your daughter. As for honor, he has his third of the world that he received when the realms were first apportioned and is the lord over those he received and with whom he dwells.

Demeter's Disguised Arrival at Eleusis

WHEN HE HAD SAD THIS, he roused his horses and at his bidding they bore the swift chariot easily through the air like long-winged birds. Hearing him, Demeter's grief became anguish and her heart swelled with wrath. Angered with Zeus, the storm-black son of Cronus, she stayed away from the assembly of the gods and lofty Olympus and went in disguise for a long time to dwell with mortal men. No man who saw her knew her nor did any of the women who at that time wore their belts low over their hips, until she arrived at the house of the wise man Celeus, who was at that time the lord of Eleusis, where incense is always burning. She sat broken-hearted near the road at the Virgin's Well, where the women of the town drew water and where a dense olive tree grew giving shade. Sitting there, she looked like a woman long since a crone, who can bear no children nor enjoy the gifts of Aphrodite; such women are nurses for the children of kings, who administer justice, and they work as housekeepers throughout their endless rooms. The daughters of Celeus, son of Eleusinus, saw her as they were bringing bronze jars of water to their father's house. There were four daughters, whose flowering beauty was such beauty as goddesses have: Callidice and Cleisidice, lovely Demo and Callithoë, who was the eldest of them all. They did not recognize the woman as Demeter, however, since it is always difficult for the gods to be seen by mortals. But, standing near her, they said:

Who are you, old woman? Why do you stay outside the town instead of approaching the city? There, in the shadowy halls, there are women as old as you—and younger ones as well—who will welcome you in word and deed.

That's what they said. Lady Demeter answered them:

Dear children, bless you, whoever you are, you splendid girls. I shall tell you, for it would not be unseemly in speaking to girls such as you to tell the truth. My name is Dos, for that is the one my dear mother gave me. Now I have come from Crete upon the broad back of the sea, although I did not want to. Men, pirates they were, they took me away by force. Later, they put their swift ship in at Thoricus. There, a crowd of women came down to the sea and prepared a meal for us by the stern cables of our ship. But I had no desire for the pleasure of food. In secret stealing away through the dark land, I fled my vile captors so they might not sell me and have enjoyment of my price. Thus, I wandered about and now have come here–although I don't know just where I am nor who these people are who live here. But may all the gods on Olympus give you good husbands and may they grant that you bear as many children as you wish. Pity me, girls . . .

Lacuna: and tell me

. . . Dear children, to whose house I should go to find proper work, doing the sort of tasks old women do: to nurse a new-born child, holding him in my arms. I could also keep the house and make the lord's bed, the bed that lies deep within the well-built chambers, and I could teach the women their work."

So the goddess spoke, and the unwedded virgin Callidice answered her, Callidice, the best-looking of the daughters of Celeus:

Old Mother, poor mortals must endure what the gods dole out because they are much our betters. Ah, but let me explain it to you clearly and tell you the names of the men who are important, the ones honored in our town and who rule our people and guard the citadel, that sits like a

crown upon our city — the ones who counsel us and keep our peace. There is Triptolemus, the wise, and Dioclus and Polyxenus, irreproachable Eumolpus and Dolichus and our own valorous father; and all of them have wives who keep their houses. And none of them on first seeing you would dishonor your person and send you away. Rather, they will welcome you because you are like some god. If you wish, stay here and we will go to our father's house to tell Metaneira, our mother, Metaneira, who wears her belt low over her hips – we will tell her everything from start to finish. And we will see if she wants you to come to our house rather than go seek some other. She has borne a son late in her life and is nursing him in her well-built chamber, a child most prayed for by us all. If you nurse and raise him and he reaches young manhood, then all women when they see you will envy you – so many will be the gifts she will pay you for rearing him.

Demeter's Entrance into the House

SHE SAID THAT and the goddess shook her head in assent. The maidens then filled their shining vessels with water and carried them home rejoicing. Quickly they arrived at their father's great mansion and quickly they told their mother what they had seen and heard. And she bade them go quickly to call the old woman and offer her a handsome wage. As deer or young heifers frolic in the meadows, sating themselves with the new shoots of springtime, thus the maidens as they held the folds of their gossamer robes rushed along the grooves of the wagon trail, their hair tossing about their shoulders like crocus blossoms, saffron and gold. They found the glorious goddess near the road, just where they had left her. Then they led her to their father's house and she walked behind them with a heavy heart, draped from head to foot, and around the delicate feet of the goddess, her dark robe fluttered. Soon they arrived at the house of Celeus, whom god favors, and they went through the corridors until they reached their mother, lady Metaneira. She was sitting by a pillar and was holding her new offspring, her son, on her lap. The girls ran to their mother's side; then Demeter stepped to the threshold, her head grazing the roof beam - and the doorway was filled with her divine aura. Awe and reverence seized the mother and she grew pale from fear.

The Throne and Drink of Hospitality

SHE ROSE AND BEGGED THE GODDESS to be seated on her own chair, but Demeter, the goddess who brings forth the seasons and gives us splendid gifts, did not choose to be seated on the glittering chair; rather, she stood in silence with her beautiful eyes cast down, until the scheming lambe gave her a stool and threw a gleaming ram's fleece over it. Sitting there, she drew her veil across her face and for a long time sat grieving, speechless as she sat upon the stool. Nor did she say or do a thing; she just sat mirthless, with a taste for neither food nor drink, wasting away because of her desire for her daughter. Thus she remained until the scheming lambe amused her with jokes and made the Holy Lady smile, then laugh, softening her heart – lambe who in later times pleased her at her rites of Mystery. Metaneira offered her a cup filled with wine, as sweet as honey, but she refused it, telling her the red wine would be a sacrilege. She asked instead for barley and water to drink mixed with tender leaves of *glechon.* Metaneira made the potion and gave it to the goddess as she had asked; and great Deo received the potion as the precedent for the Mystery . . . [Lacuna of 22 to 26 verses]

As Wet nurse For Demophoön

. . . METANEIRA, whose robe hung in thick folds about her hips, said to her:

> *Greetings, woman, I do not think you are of low parentage, since modesty distinguishes your looks and grace, as if you were descended from a line of kings, who administer justice. But we poor miserable mortals must suffer what the gods dole out and it seems a yoke of misfortune encircles your neck. Now since you have come here, what's mine shall be yours also. Nurse this child of mine: the gods granted him to me late in life when I had lost all hope of bearing him, and I prayed for him often. If you nurse him and he reaches young manhood, then all women when they see you will envy you—so many will be the gifts I shall pay for raising him.*

Demeter, the goddess who wears a splendid crown, then answered her:

Greetings to you, woman, may the gods bless you with all that is good. I shall gently rear your child as you have bidden me. Have no fear for his safety, for he'll suckle the milk from no wicked nurse nor risk incantations that possess a babe nor will he taste of witches' root; for I know the powerful great herbs that are gathered and the talisman plant that wards off possession.

So saying, she lifted him in her immortal hands and held him to her fragrant breast; and his mother rested content. Thus Demeter nursed the handsome son of wise Celeus, the son whom Metaneira bore, Metaneira whose robe hung in thick folds about her hips. The child flourished and grew like a god, for he fed not on mother's milk, but upon ambrosia, the food of gods, with which Demeter anointed him – anointed as if born a god himself; and she inspired him with her breath sweetly as she rocked him in her lap and at night she would bury him in the powers of the fire upon the hearth. But his parents knew none of this, and to them he was like a miracle, a kind of prodigy, somehow divine. The goddess would have made him ageless and immortal had it not been for the folly of Metaneira, his own mother. One night, watching from the sweet-smelling chamber, she spied upon the goddess at her magic and deranged by what she saw shrieked and beat her thighs in terror for her child. Horror-stricken she let forth this torrent of words:

That woman, a guest in my house – dear Demophoön – she is burying you in a great fire and she leaves it to me to mourn and bear the pain of grief.

So she wailed in anguish and the goddess who is a goddess amongst goddesses heard her. Enraged with her folly, Demeter, whose crown is splendid, grabbed the child from the fire and threw him to the ground, the son Metaneira had borne, the one for whom she had lost all hope—and so furious was her heart that she said to Metaneira:

All men are fools! They lack the sense to foresee their fate as it comes upon them, good or ill, whatever it be. You, because your head is witless, it is you who have caused this irreversible mistake. Let the oath of the gods be known, the oath that is sworn by the unassuageable

deathless water of the River Styx: I would have made this son ageless for all of time and I would have granted him undying honor, but now he can never escape the demons that bring his death. Yet he has rested on my lap and slept in my arms, and for that he will always have undying honor: in remembrance of him, all in due course as the season returns, young Eleusinians will always join together in contest and battle again and again.

Building the First Sanctuary

I AM DEMETER, the one supreme in honor, for I am the source of life and joy both for mortals and immortals. This is what you must do. Have all your people build me a temple with an altar before it, beside the fortress of the high city that looms above Callichoron Well. And I myself shall institute my rites so that you may perform them and so conciliate my wrath.

As she said that, the goddess was transformed, as if a wind had blown off her old age and left but her glorious beauty; her robes exhaled sweet perfumes, her skin radiated the aura of the immortals, and her golden hair covered her shoulders. The palace was filled with brilliance such as the brilliance lightning gives. Then she turned and walked out of the hall.

When she had gone, Metaneira stood trembling and for a long time remained speechless, nor did she remember to pick up her beloved child from the floor. But his sisters heard his pitiful cries and rushed from their beds, beds that were strewn with rich coverings. Then one of them picked up the child and laid him on her lap. One rekindled the fire, while another raised up her mother and hurried her out of the fragrant room upon her delicate feet. Next they bathed the trembling child, fondling him, hoping to calm him after what had just happened, but he could not be assuaged—no matter how well they nursed him, they could not compare with Demeter.

All night long they propitiated the glorious goddess as they trembled in fear and when dawn appeared they told the whole truth to powerful Celeus, as the goddess had commanded them, Demeter, whose crown is splendid. Then Celeus called his many subjects to an assembly and commanded them to build an opulent temple for Demeter, whose hair grew in rich plaits as

only a goddess's does, and he told them to build an altar on the rising hill. And as soon as they heard his voice, they obeyed him and built the temple as he had bid them. And the temple grew under her help.

The Plague of Demeter's Grief

WHEN THEY FINISHED THE TEMPLE and had stopped working, they went home, each to his own house. But golden-haired Demeter remained there sitting apart from all the blessed gods, wasting away with longing for her daughter, Persephone whose robe hung in thick folds about her hips. Then she made a deadly year for mankind, withering the soil that is so nourishing, and Earth would not send up seeds because Demeter, the goddess who wears a splendid crown, kept them hidden. In vain the oxen pulled the curved plowshare through the fields, and much white barley fell to the earth, where it was wasted. And now she would have destroyed the whole race of mortal men by famine and robbed the gods of their honors and sacrifices, the gods who have Olympus for their home, had not Zeus perceived this and pondered it in his heart.

First he sent Iris, who flies on wings of gold, to call upon Demeter, whose hair grew in rich plaits as only a goddess's does and whose face glows with beauty. That was his decision and Iris obeyed Zeus, the storm-black son of Cronus. Swiftly she cut through the sky and arrived at the city of Eleusis, where incense perfumes the air. She found Demeter in her temple wearing the dark robes of a mourner, and she spoke this flutter of words:

> *Demeter, father Zeus calls you to come rejoin the undying race of the gods who will always be. Come now, don't let my message from Zeus go unheeded.*

That's what she said, imploring her, but Demeter's mind could not be changed. Then father Zeus sent out all the blessed gods and one by one they went to her and called upon her and gave her many splendid gifts and let her choose as much honor as she might want among the immortals. But no one could persuade her to change her mind since she was so angered, and she stubbornly ignored their pleas. She said she would never again set foot on fragrant Olympus or let the earth bear fruit unless she saw her beautiful daughter with her own eyes.

The Summons For Persephone’s Release

FINALLY ZEUS HEARD THIS, Zeus the thunder god, and he sent Hermes, who carries a golden wand, into Erebus, Hermes whom they call the Argus-killer because he slew that hundred-eyed monster, and now Zeus sent him that he might exhort Hades with soft words to let him lead holy Persephone out of the sunless west into the light. Then her mother would see her with her own eyes and seeing her, change her temper.

So, leaving the seat of Olympus, Hermes obeyed and rushed through the hollows of the earth. He found the Lord of the Dead seated in his house on a couch with his awesome wife, but it was not her will that kept her seated there since all she could will was her mother. But her mother was far away, thinking over what the gods had done. Standing nearby, the mighty slayer of Argus addressed him:

> *Lord of Death, you Hades whose hair is purple, father Zeus commanded me to lead glorious Persephone out of Erebus back to us gods so that her mother, when she sees her with her own eyes, will stop her wrath and her horrible anger against the immortals – because she is planning a great act of vengeance: she is going to destroy the feeble race of mortals who dwell on the earth; this will she do by keeping the seeds hidden underground and so will she cause the honors that are paid to the gods to perish. She has a furious wrath and won’t mingle with the gods; instead she sits apart from us in her fragrant temple, which is scented with incense, and she holds as her domain now the rocky citadel of Eleusis.*

He said that; and the lord of the Dead, Aidoneus, smiled and raised his eyebrows nor did he disobey the command of Zeus the king. Hurrying, he gave these commands to Persephone, the queen of miracles:

> *Go, Persephone, to your mother, the lady who wears deep purple robes, and have a kindly spirit in your breast and be not so despondent. I will not make so bad a husband for you amongst the immortals; after all, lam Zeus’s own brother. When you are there in his realm, you will rule over all the plants that grow and all moving creatures. Yours will be the greatest honor amongst all immortals and anyone who fails to make*

sacrifices to you and does not perform your rites or forgets to offer you appropriate gifts will learn the consequences.

The Ruse of the Pomegranate

HE SAID THAT and Persephone rejoiced and quickly jumped up from her throne in glee. But he, himself, gave her in secret a sweet pomegranate seed to eat so that she might not remain forever with her mother, the awesome Demeter whose robe is a deep purple. Then Aidoneus, who rules over many, harnessed his immortal horses to a golden chariot. Persephone got into the chariot and beside her sat the mighty slayer of Argus, Hermes, who held the reins and a whip in his hands. And they sped through the hall with horses eager to fly. Quickly they made the long journey back and neither the sea nor the waters of the rivers could hinder the flight of such immortal horses, no, nor even the grassy valleys nor the mountaintops, but always onwards did they cut through the air over the very mountaintops like a ship through the deep ocean. And then Hermes stopped them where Demeter was waiting in front of her temple perfumed with incense; and when she saw her daughter, she ran to her as a maenad, racing through a mountain wood, runs. [Verses 387-405 badly mutilated; restoration uncertain]

And Persephone, for her part, when she saw her mother's beautiful eyes, leapt from the chariot and fell on her knees, covering her mother with embraces. But while Demeter still was caressing her child and holding her in her arms, she thought with horror—a trap—and trembling with her fear, she stopped fondling her beloved daughter and spoke these words:

My child, when you were below the earth, did you eat any food? Tell me the truth and don't hide anything from me, so that we both may know. Because if you didn't accept his hospitality, you can flee from the halls of that loathsome Hades and dwell with me and your father, the storm-black son of Cronus, where you will be honored by all the immortals. But if you did eat anything, you will have to make the journey back again to the depths of the earth and live with Hades for a third part of the seasons of the year and stay here with me and the other immortals for only two of the three. When the earth abounds with all the fragrant blossoms that come with spring, then from the sunless west out of the

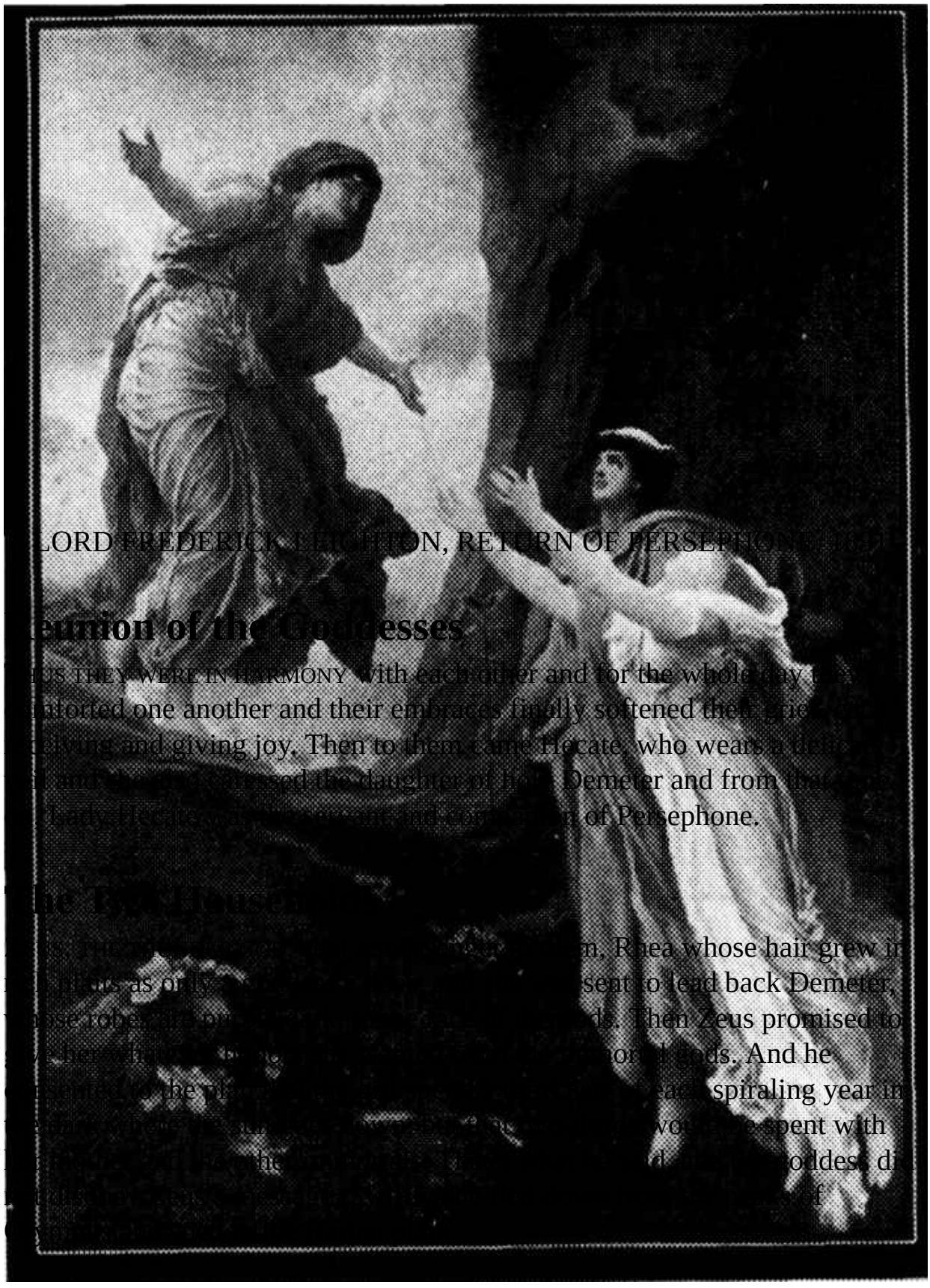
dark night you'll rise and appear as a great miracle to the gods and mortal men . . . [lacuna] . . . And with what trick did the god who receives all deceive you?

Persephone, most beautiful, answered her:

I will tell you everything just as it truly happened, Mother. When Hermes came to me, Hermes the helper and swift messenger of the gods – when he came, beseeched by my father Zeus, son of Cronus, and by all the other gods who live on Olympus – when he came to lead me out of Erebus so that you could see me with your own eyes, he came so that you would cease your wrath with the immortals and calm your terrible anger. So he came and I jumped up for joy, but he—Hades—forced upon me a pomegranate seed, forced it upon me against my will so that I would eat it—and I did eat of that sweet fruit.

The Abduction, Reprise

AND I'LL ALSO TELL HOW he seized me according to the plan of my father, the son of Cronus, and brought me into the hollows of the earth. I'll tell you all this, everything you have asked.
All of us were playing in a lush meadow, my friends and I—Leucippe and Phaino, Electra and Ioathe—and I was playing with Melite, Iache, Rhodeia and Callithoë, Melobosis and Tyche, and also with Ocyrhoë, who is as beautiful as a flower herself. There were also Chryseis, Ianeira, Acaste and Admete, Rhodope, Pluto and Calypso, whom all men desire. And with us were Styx and Urania, lovely Galaxaura and Pallas, who spurs on battles, and Artemis, the archer. Thus we all played, all virgins and full-bloomed in youth: we gathered the blossoms of earth in our hands, flower gathering flower—bouquets of gentle crocus, iris and hyacinth, rose buds and lilies, gorgeous to see. And there was a narcissus—the wide earth had brought it forth, glorious as a crocus, a jewel—and in ecstasy I spied it and plucked it, but the earth gave way beneath and from her burst the great lord Hades, who receives many. In his golden chariot, he carried me beneath the earth and I struggled all unwilling, screaming shrilly a lament. Wretched though it makes me, I have told you the whole truth.



LORD FREDERICK LEIGHTON, RETURN OF PERSEPHONE

eunion of the Goddesses

US THEY WERE IN HARMONY with each other and for the whole day
nforted one another and their embraces finally softened their grie
elving and giving joy. Then to them came Hecate, who wears a diadem
l and she also caressed the daughter of holy Demeter and from that
Lady Hecate was her constant companion and confidante of Persephone.

he 'Eye' Heuse

m, Rhea whose hair grew in
sent to lead back Demeter,
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The Arrangement Ratified by the Mystery

FORMERLY THIS PLAIN WAS THE RICHEST OF FIELDS that give life, but at this time it gave no life at all, lying waste, barren and all leafless. And the white barley was hidden in the earth by Demeter's plan. But in a little while, as the springtime progressed, it would be waving long ears of grain like a mane in the wind and its fertile furrows would be filled with grain lying at harvest, while other ears would be bound in sheaves. It was in that field that she alighted first out of the uncharted sky. When the goddesses saw each other, they embraced and rejoiced in their hearts. Then Rhea, who wore a delicate veil, said: [Verses 462-70: text damaged; reconstruction uncertain]

> *COME, my child, Zeus the thunder god calls you to come rejoin the race of the gods and he promised whatever honors you might want from the other immortals. He agreed that your daughter spend a third part of each spiraling year in the dark where the sun goes down and the other two-thirds with you and the other immortals. That's what he said was to be and he nodded his head in assent. So come, child, and obey and persist not in fighting with the stormy son of Cronus, but once again give the earth's fruit to mankind.*

That's what she said. And she was not disobeyed, for as soon as she had finished speaking, Demeter made fruits spring up from the rich plowlands, and the whole wide world became heavy with leaves and flowers. Then she went forth to the kings who administer justice, Triptolemus and Diocles, who drives horses, and mighty Eumolpus and Celeus, the leader of his people. To them, she showed the performance of her rites and taught her Mysteries – holy rites that are awesome, that no one may transgress not reveal nor express in words, for an overwhelming reverence for the gods stops his voice. Whoever among men who walk the earth has seen these Mysteries is blessed, but whoever is uninitiated and has not received his share of the rite, he will not have the same lot as the others, once he is dead and dwells in the mould where the sun goes down.

And when the goddess among goddesses had taught them everything, she went to Olympus to be in the company of the other gods. There the two goddesses live with Zeus, who delights in the thunderbolt, and they are holy and revered.

The Hospitality of Plutus

WHOMEVER THE GODDESSES LOVE among men who walk the earth, he is blessed, for they soon send Plutus into his great house to live at his own hearth, Plutus who gives wealth to mortal men.

Farewell

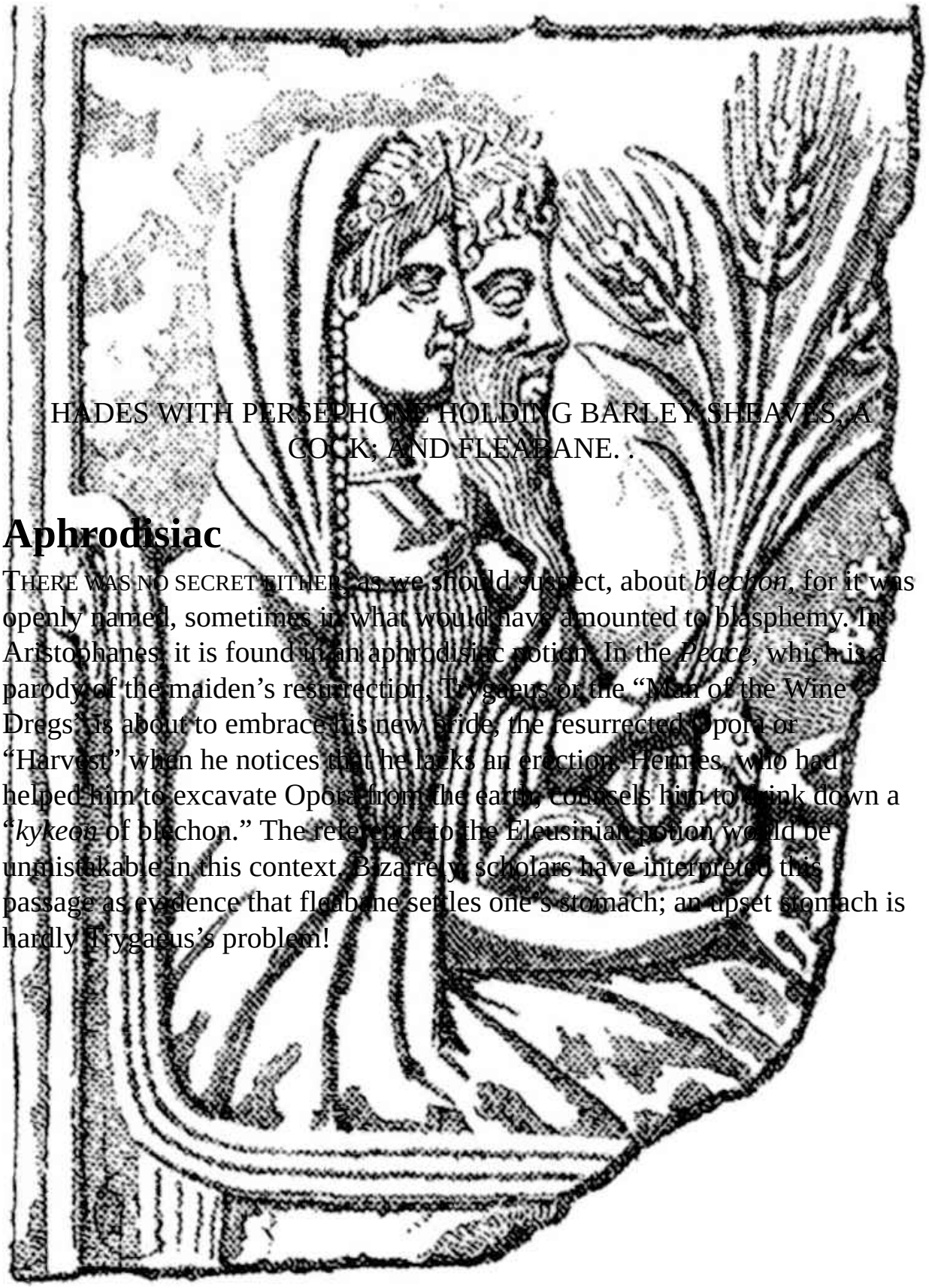
BUT COME NOW, you goddesses who preside over the town of Eleusis, where incense perfumes the air – you two who also have domains on Paros, which the sea surrounds, and in mountainous Antron – you lady Deo who brings in the seasons and gives splendid gifts, you and your beautiful daughter Persephone, come now grant me an easy life for my song. And still again may I pray to sing you a song.

12

Fleabane

THE FORMULA FOR THE *KYKEON* is unambiguous: pennyroyal and barley in water. So suspicion for a psychoactive agent first fell upon the mint, since obviously the barley was innocuous.

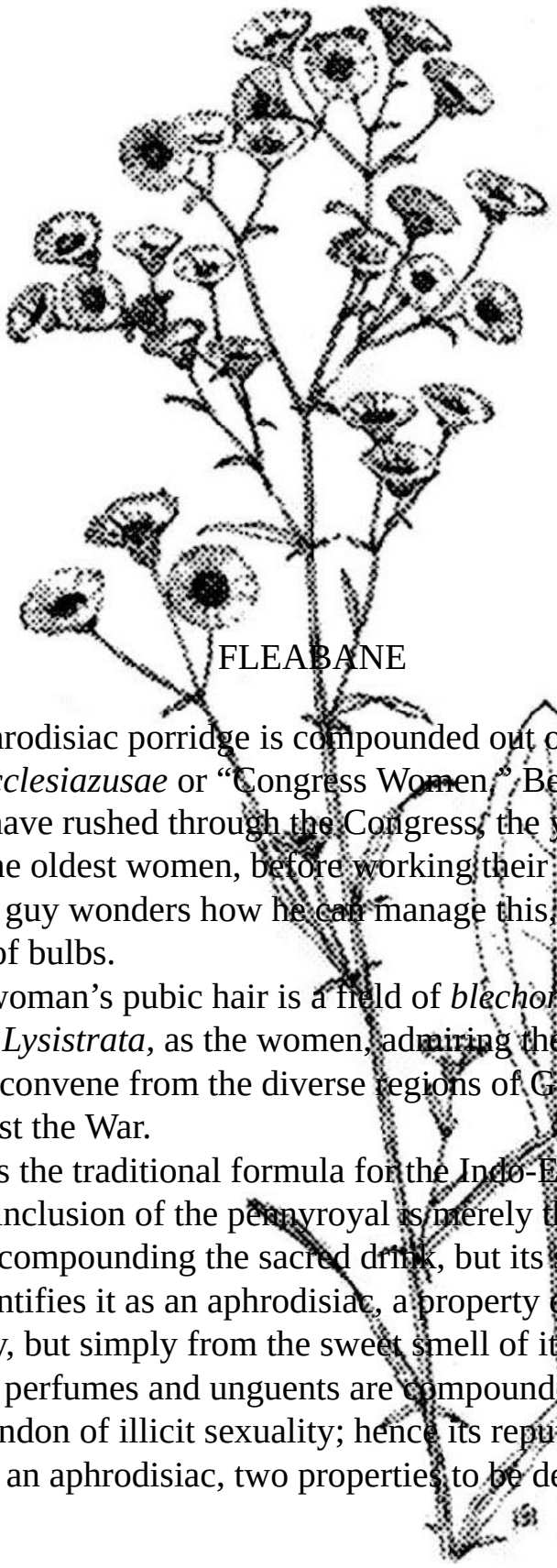
Glechon (or *blechon*), as it is called in Greek, has definite toxic properties, hence its common name as fleabane from its use as an insecticide or repellent. Although commonly employed as a contraceptive and abortifacient, its effectiveness is not documented, whereas the ingestion of a large dosage produces massive necrosis of the central lobular region of the brain, swelling of the lungs, internal bleeding, seizure, coma, and even death. Now, perhaps such an approximation to death might in some instances produce hallucinations, but it would hardly qualify as a psychoactive Eucharist, nor is it possible to conceive of the large quantities required, the maceration etc. in the Mystery Chamber, nor was alcohol an option to attempt a concentrated tincture. The plant is identified as pennyroyal (*Mentha pulegium,* the second element being derived from *pulex* or "flea"), a pleasant smelling mint, from which menthol can be extracted. The toxic extract, on the other hand, is pulegone and its chemically similar relatives. The plant's common name as pennyroyal in English is a corruption of the Latin *pulegium*, with the addition of "royal," which can only be a vague remembrance of its role in the ancient Mystery Eucharist. This identification, however, cannot be accepted as certain since several plants were called *blechon* in the Classical period; similarly in English, various herbs efficacious in destroying or repelling fleas receive the same name.



HADES WITH PERSEPHONE HOLDING BARLEY SHEAVES, A COCK, AND FLEABANE. .

Aphrodisiac

THERE WAS NO SECRET EITHER, as we should suspect, about *blechon*, for it was openly named, sometimes in what would have amounted to blasphemy. In Aristophanes, it is found in an aphrodisiac potion. In the *Peace*, which is a parody of the maiden's resurrection, Trygaeus or the "Man of the Wine Dregs" is about to embrace his new bride, the resurrected Opora or "Harvest" when he notices that he lacks an erection. Hermes, who had helped him to excavate Opora from the earth, counsels him to drink down a "*kykeon* of blechon." The reference to the Eleusinian potion would be unmistakable in this context. Bizarrely, scholars have interpreted this passage as evidence that fleabane settles one's stomach; an upset stomach is hardly Trygaeus's problem!



FLEABANE

A similar aphrodisiac porridge is compounded out of “bulbs” in Aristophanes’ *Ecclesiazusae* or “Congress Women.” Because of the decree that the women have rushed through the Congress, the young men now must first sleep with the oldest women, before working their way down to the younger; and the guy wonders how he can manage this, but the crone prescribes a pot of bulbs.

Similarly, a woman’s pubic hair is a field of *blechon* awaiting its harvest in Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata,* as the women, admiring their comrades’ seductive allure, convene from the diverse regions of Greece to enact their insurgency against the War.

Not only does the traditional formula for the Indo-European mixed drink indicate that the inclusion of the pennyroyal is merely the natural or wild plant needed for compounding the sacred drink, but its symbolism in Greek herbalist lore identifies it as an aphrodisiac, a property derived not from any chemical efficacy, but simply from the sweet smell of its menthol. It was the stuff from which perfumes and unguents are compounded, and as such it connoted the abandon of illicit sexuality; hence its reputation as an abortifacient and an aphrodisiac, two properties to be desired in illicit

copulation. Such perfumed fragrances were more appropriate to the courtesan, something a proper woman would feel ashamed to wear.

Thus it was that the women of the citizenry in solidarity of their shared rank celebrated the monogamous restraint of marriage and the incorporation of their daughters into the status of wifedom by smearing themselves and their beds with rank smelling herbs when they camped out away from their men on the Acropolis for the Thesmophoria, a festival in honor of the reunited Demeter and Persephone. The plant involved was the *Vitex agnus castus* or chaste-berry, whose volatile oil is reputed to improve the menstrual cycle and increase fertility. Its name in Latin as the "chaste lamb" by confusion with the *agnus Dei* or "Lamb of God" is a corruption of the Greek *hagnos* or "holy." The plant was considered an an-aphrodisiac and acquired later names like monk's pepper from its use in monasteries and nunneries to facilitate sexual abstinence. The fruits have the pungent scent of pepper.

> 'Come my beloved, let me do you! Oh Lord Hermes, do I appear a bit ruined since I have been so long kept from my Harvest-girl?' 'No problem if you just drink some pennyroyal concoction.'
>
> ARISTOPHANES PEACE, VERSES 709 SQ.

The chaste-berry signified marriage, with its imposed chastity and proper procreation; Hera, who was the patroness of the rite was said to have been born beneath the tree, whereas, fleabane was the opposite. The presence of *blechon* in the Eleusinian potion signifies the illicit nature of Persephone's abduction and Demeter's refusal to countenance such an unsanctified union. In ethnobotanical lore, Mint (*Mentha*) was said to be Hades' concubine, dismembered by the jealous wife Persephone. It was also said that Demeter showed her repugnance for the illicit union by turning the prostitute Mint into the herb that bears her name and grinding her underfoot or by condemning her to perpetual sterility, a proper fate for an abortifacient.

The final Eleusinian solution, on the other hand, will reconcile the mother to the daughter's loss through legitimatizing the nuptial abduction in

the rite of matrimony, whereby an heir can accede to the dynastic house. Barley, the cultivated foodstuff, and not the wild mint, is the revelation at Eleusis, and it is to it that we must look for the sacred drug.

> ‘Oh, you Boeotian darling! What a great field you have there!’ ‘Yes, with all my blechon so cosmetically depilated!’
>
> ARISTOPHANES LYSISTRATA, VERSES 87 SQ.

with Albert Hofmann

13

Drunken Lolium

THE SECRET APPARENTLY WAS NEVER LOST, but just reserved as the special knowledge of the herbalists. A common grassy weed has the botanical designation as *Lolium temulentum,* or “drunken lolium.” It is commonly known as the Biblical tares, a weed that is a plague in the fields of grain, a word derived from a Middle High German word for “fool”; and it is also known as darnel, a word derived from “dizzy,” although the long history of the word goes back to wheat, a kind of bread, and ultimately to Sanskrit where it means “panic grass.” Its supposed intoxicating properties are further sensed in its French name as *ivraie* (i.e., *ivre*, “drunk”), which appears also in English as ivray. The French word is cited at least as early as 1236 CE and it is probably of much greater ancestry. In German it is called *Taumelloch*, “Giddy-legs.”

In ancient Roman traditions, the plant affects the eyesight, which is to say, that they were aware of its visionary properties. In Plautus’s comedy, the *Miles Gloriosus*, the two slaves are criticizing each other’s misperceptions: one tells the other that he might as well have his eyes dug out since he is seeing things that never happened; the other retaliates that his mate is so cheap that he has been eating darnel, given how inexpensive grain is on the market, with the result that he is purblind: “Purblind, indeed!” the other retaliates, “You are totally blind!” It is not, however, a matter of darkened or diminished sight, but altered sight. Pliny records that bread made from

darnel very quickly induces fits of dizziness, vertigo, to use his word. He goes on to record that bath keepers in Asia Minor and Greece were in the custom of throwing darnel on the hot coals when they wanted to clear the loitering clientele from the premises with its drugging fumes; as a polymath, Pliny was uncritical of his sources, and here he has apparently confused one grass with another better known for its psychoactive properties, namely the grass that came to be known as cannabis.

DARNEL

May the fields be free of the lolium that corrupts one's sight!

OVID, FASTI VERSE 1. 691.

The ancient Greeks also were quite aware of the psychotropic properties of lolium, for which they had several names, one being *thyaros* or the "plant of inspired frenzy." Aristotle in his treatise *On Sleep and Sleeplessness* considered darnel a somnifacient causing heaviness analogous to the effect of opium, mandragora, and certain wines. We can know, moreover, that he was speaking of the darnel that grew in Greece, for Theophrastus tells us that darnel from Sicily lacked such psychotropic properties.
In what follows Albert Hofmann's comments are in italic:

ANALYSIS OF LOLIUM TEMULENTUM in my laboratory and an extended botanical, chemical, and pharmacological investigation by I. Ruiz

showed that the plant itself contains no alkaloids nor does it possess any pharmacological activity.

So therein is an enigma. Why is darnel sometimes psychoactive and other times not, when it has no such properties of its own?

The Ancestor of the Barley

THE ELEUSINIAN TRADITIONS that we have examined clearly indicate that the two levels of the Mysteries were both involved with herbalist rituals, each with a psychoactive plant related to the other as brother to brother in a pattern that balanced wild growths with their complement. As viewed in ancient mythopoeia, the arts of cultivation symbolized the evolution and redemption of human life and society.

HOFMANN (LEFT) AND WASSON

Masha Wasson Britten

With the cultivation of grain, ma left his wild, nom and settled in citi ng honor to th n order to receiv harvest. and cyb ions derived delicate accord ex- dar death. Grain was thought to b carefully, even primitive g not tended with great care, it was or in the w ions of excessive moisture, it could ert to its w s to cite a preceding "primitive" s thought to be darnel or lolium, called *aira* in Greek, similated from Sumerian for "wheat," but the same pun that we have seen in the symbolic relationship of the pruned vine to its wild predecessor from the realm of Nysa, the ivy of Dionysus. Tares are related to the barley, as ivy to the vine. An enemy, as in the Biblical parable, could ruin the crop by planting tares during the night. In fact, the sterility that Demeter unleashed upon the fields in her grief for her abducted daughter took the form of a plague of tares.

Darnel was considered an altogether wild plant, growing amidst the harvest, not unlike another common weed in fields of barley, the corn poppy or "pomegranate poppy" *Papaver rhoeas,* a poppy whose seed capsule

resembles the pomegranate in color and shape. Like the darnel, it, too, could be hybridized through cultivation to produce the *Papaver somniferens*, the source of opium. The fruit of the pomegranate and the sheaf of barley both are cultivars emblematic of Persephone's triumph over Death in birthing the Mystery Child. The pomegranate itself, moreover, as it fruits on its tree, resembles apples, but hanging on its bough, the long calyx gives the red fruit a stipe like the fly-agaric.

> There are two main foodstuffs. Demeter, Goddess—she is Earth, and whatever other name you want to call her: she is the one who nourishes us with dry food. Then, her counterbalance, Semele's son, he discovered and introduced the liquid drink of the grape.
>
> EURIPIDES BACCHAE, VERSES 274 SQ.

Ergot

IN JULY 1975 I was visiting my friend Gordon Wasson in his home in Danbury when he suddenly asked me this question: whether Early Man in ancient Greece could have hit on a method to isolate an hallucinogen from ergot that would have given him an experience comparable to LSD or psilocybin. I replied that this might well have been the case and I promised to send him, after further reflection, an exposition of our present knowledge on the subject, which I already suspected would support my tentative position.

The psychoactive properties of darnel are derived entirely from a fungal parasite to which it is particularly prone. This appears as the sclerotia or hardened mass of the mycelium, the root-like growth of the mushroom, which permeates the individual kernels of the grass, enlarging them and imparting a characteristic red color. It is commonly called "rust" and "ergot," the latter from the French for the spur or pointed talon on a cock's leg, which it resembles, hence its name also as "cockle." In botanical nomenclature it is

called *Claviceps purpurea* or “purple key-head,” since the ancient “key” or *clavis* was shaped like a knobbed bolt. Its common names in Greek derive from the same two metaphors: it is *erysibe*, “rust,” and *aira*, the “hammer,” the latter actually designating darnel and indicating how closely associated it was with its ergot infestations since it is descriptive only of the ergotized kernels.

> *In German there seem to be more variants than in other languages:* Mutterkorn, Rockenmutter, Afterkorn, Todtenkorn, Tollkorn, *and many others. In German folklore there was a belief that, when the corn waved in the wind, the corn mother (a demon) was passing through the field; her children were the rye wolves (ergot). In our context, we observe that of these names, two,* seigle *ivre (‘drunken rye’) and* Tollkorn (*‘mad grain’*), *point to a knowledge of the psychotropic effects of ergot. This folk awareness of the mind-changing effects of ergot shows an intimate knowledge of its properties, at least among herbalists, deeply rooted in European traditions.*

Purple-crimson was the characteristic color of Demeter’s robe and slippers, and the color is linked with the awesome powers of the underworld; the Lord Hades is given crimson hair in the Homeric hymn. Demeter even bore the epithet of Erysibe. Her barley was particularly susceptible to contamination by ergot which seemed to spread from the darnel, reaching out to pull it back to its natural state, hence the metaphor of “rust” as the reddening corruption of iron, returning the metal to its natural state as the extracted mineral ore. The Romans also deified Rust as Robiga or Robigus, either female or male, and it was invoked in the festival of Robigalia on the 25^{h} April, just when the spring moisture made the grain crop most vulnerable, by offerings of a red dog to the nether Queen Hecate: the rite continued into Christian times as Rogation Day.

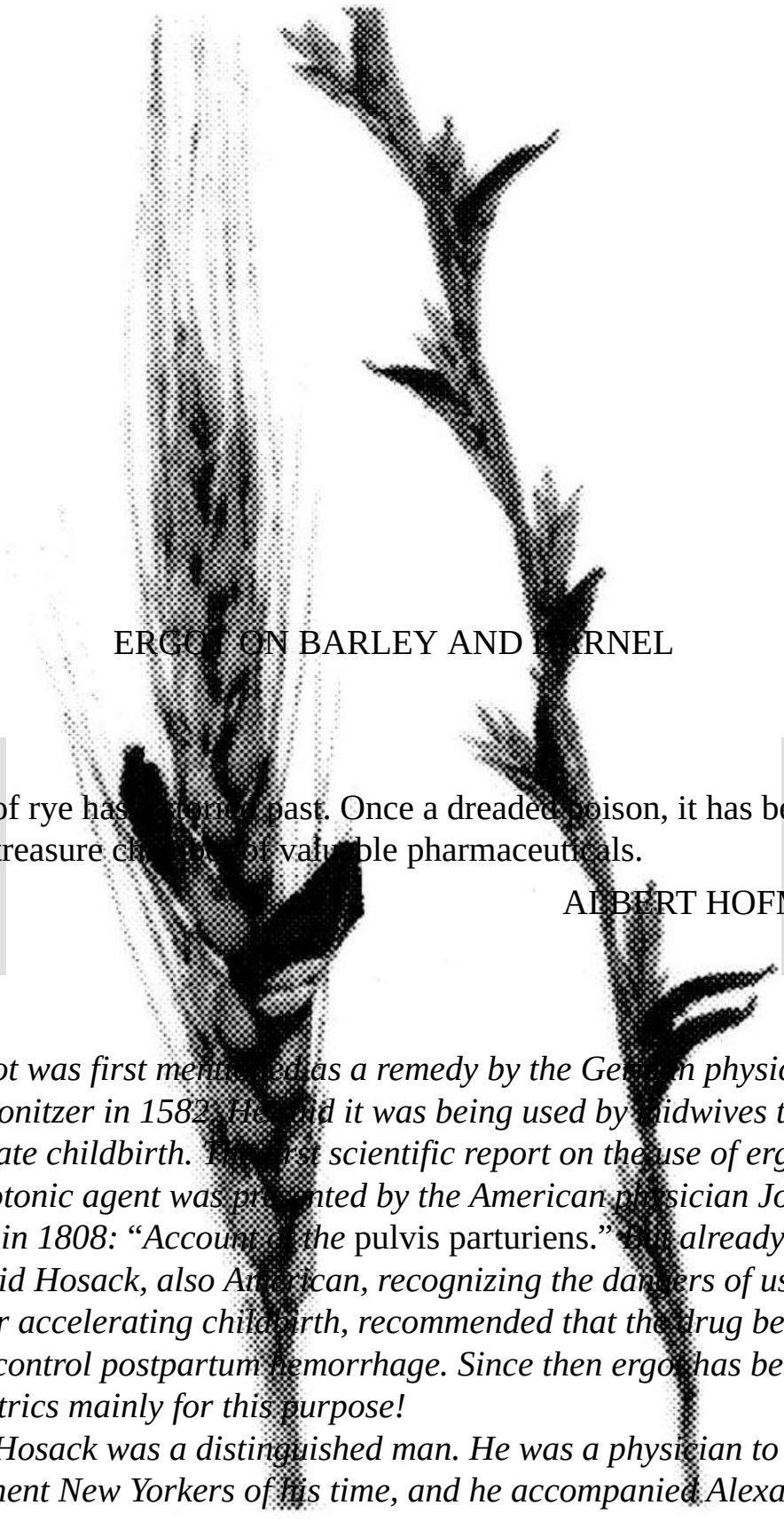
> Rust, Grip not the tender crops but rather grip the hard iron. Forestall the destroyer. Better that you should gnaw at swords and baneful weapons.

Ergot is highly toxic. Greek farmers separated the darnel from the grain by using a sieve called the “aira-cleanser” or *airopinon.* The Assyrians knew its toxicity at least as early the 7th century: medical texts on a cuneiform tablet describe noxious pustules on the ears of grain.

In the 1930s, Albert Hofmann investigated these toxins while seeking possible therapeutic uses for a plant that has long figured in the traditions of herbal medicine. These substances must be isolated and synthesized if they are to be employed in modern medicine in order to control and regulate the dosage. It was while engaged in this research that he created LSD.

> *Ergot itself is not of uniform chemical composition: it occurs in ‘biological’ or ‘chemical’ races, differing from each other mainly by the composition of their alkaloidal constituents. (Chemists define ‘alkaloids’ as nitrogen-containing alkaline substances that represent the pharmacologically active principles of many plants.) Thus in Switzerland there exist three varieties of ergot of rye: (a) in the Midlands, a race containing mainly the alkaloid ergotamine; (b) in the Valais, one with alkaloids of the ergotoxine group; and (c) in the Grisons, a variety with no alkaloids at all. Furthermore in other kinds of ergot – growing on wheat, on barley, on millet, on lolium, etc. - there are wide variations in alkaloidal makeup, sometimes depending on geographical location.*
>
> *In the Middle Ages, bizarre epidemics occurred in Europe costing thousands of people their lives, occasioned by bread made from rye contaminated with ergot. These epidemics took two forms,* Ergotismus convulsivus, *characterized by nervous convulsive and epileptic symptoms, and* Ergotismus gangraenosus, *in which gangrenous manifestations leading to mummification of the extremities were a prominent feature. Ergotism was also known as* ignis sacer *(‘holy fire’), or ‘St. Anthony’s fire’, because St. Anthony was the patron saint of a religious order founded to care for the victims of ergotism. The cause of these epidemics—bread contaminated with ergot—was not learned until*

the seventeenth century, and since then there have been only sporadic outbreaks of ergot poisoning.



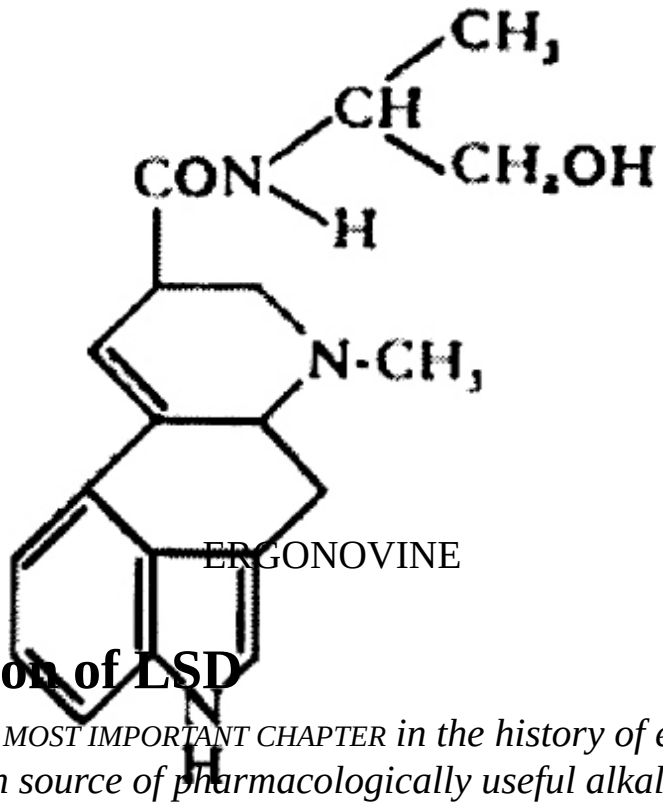
ERGOT ON BARLEY AND KERNEL

> Ergot of rye has a historical past. Once a dreaded poison, it has become a rich treasure chest of valuable pharmaceuticals.
>
> ALBERT HOFMANN

Ergot was first mentioned as a remedy by the German physician Adam Lonitzer in 1582. He said it was being used by midwives to precipitate childbirth. The first scientific report on the use of ergot as an uterotonic agent was presented by the American physician John Stearns in 1808: "Account of the pulvis parturiens." *But already in 1824 Dr. David Hosack, also American, recognizing the dangers of using ergot for accelerating childbirth, recommended that the drug be used only to control postpartum hemorrhage. Since then ergot has been used in obstetrics mainly for this purpose!*

Dr. Hosack was a distinguished man. He was a physician to many of the eminent New Yorkers of his time, and he accompanied Alexander

Hamilton to Weehawken Heights for his fatal duel with Aaron Burr.

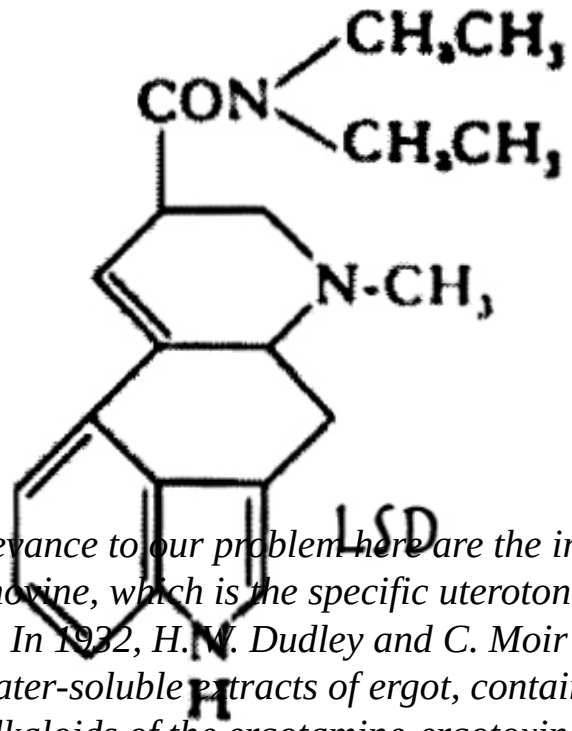


ERGONOVINE

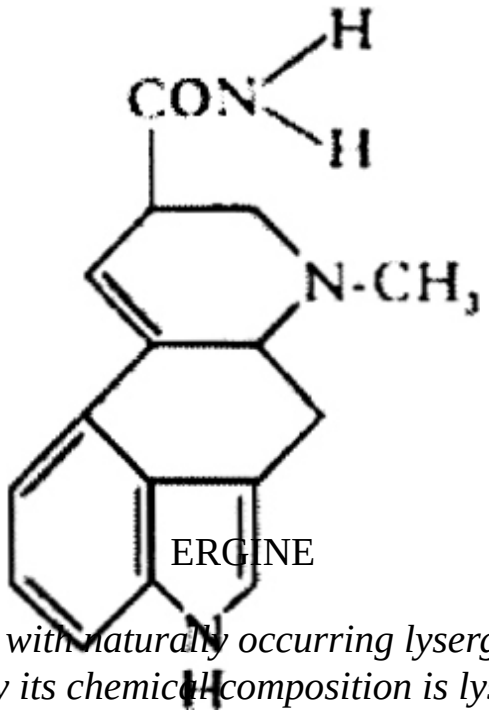
The Invention of LSD

THE LATEST AND MOST IMPORTANT CHAPTER in the history of ergot deals with it as a rich source of pharmacologically useful alkaloids. More than thirty alkaloids have been isolated from ergot and it is unlikely that many new ones will be discovered. Hundreds of chemical modifications of these natural alkaloids have been prepared and investigated pharmacologically. Today all these alkaloids are also available by total synthesis.

Medicinally the most useful alkaloids stem from ergot of rye. The first ergot alkaloid that found widespread therapeutic use was ergotamine, isolated by A. Stoll in 1918. It is the essential component of pharmaceutical preparations such as 'Cafergot' and 'Bellergal,' medicaments against migraine and nervous disorders. Modern valuable ergot preparations are 'Hydergine,' developed by A. Stoll and A. Hofmann in the Sandoz laboratories in Basel, containing hydrogenated ergotoxine alkaloids, used in the treatment of geriatric disorders, and 'Dihydergot' with dihydroergotarnine as active component, for the therapy of circulatory disturbances.

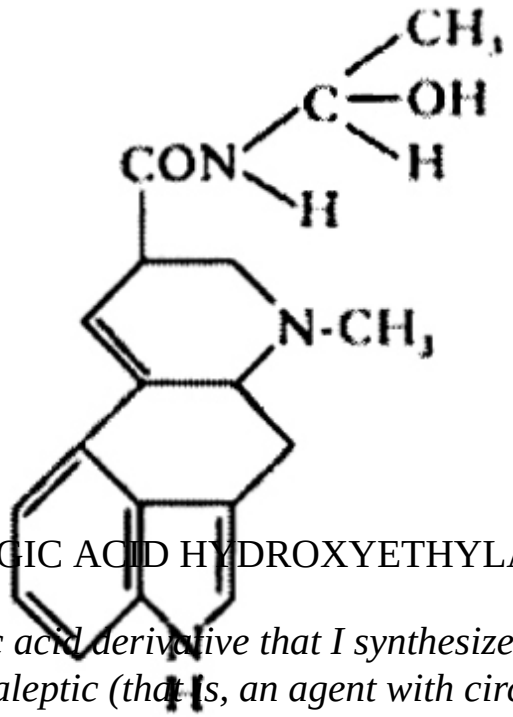


Of special relevance to our problem here are the investigations into the alkaloid ergonovine, which is the specific uterotonic water-soluble principle of ergot. In 1932, H.W. Dudley and C. Moir in England discovered that water-soluble extracts of ergot, containing none of the water-insoluble alkaloids of the ergotamine-ergotoxine-type, elicited strong uterotonic activity. This observation led three years later to the isolation of the alkaloid responsible for this action simultaneously in four separate laboratories, which named it 'ergometrine', 'ergobasin', 'ergotocine,' 'ergostetrine', respectively. The International Pharmacopoeia Commission proposed a name to be internationally accepted to replace these synonyms, viz 'ergonovine.'



ERGINE

In 1937, starting with naturally occurring lysergic acid, I prepared ergonovine, which by its chemical composition is lysergic acid propanolamide. Lysergic acid is the nucleus common to most ergot alkaloids. It is extracted from special cultures of ergot and could also be prepared today by total synthesis if this procedure were not too expensive. I used the method developed for the synthesis of ergonovine for the preparation of many chemical modifications of ergonovine. One of these partly synthetic derivatives of ergonovine was lysergic acid butanolamide. This is used today in obstetrics, replacing to a major extent ergonovine, under the brand name 'Methergine' to stop postpartum hemorrhage.

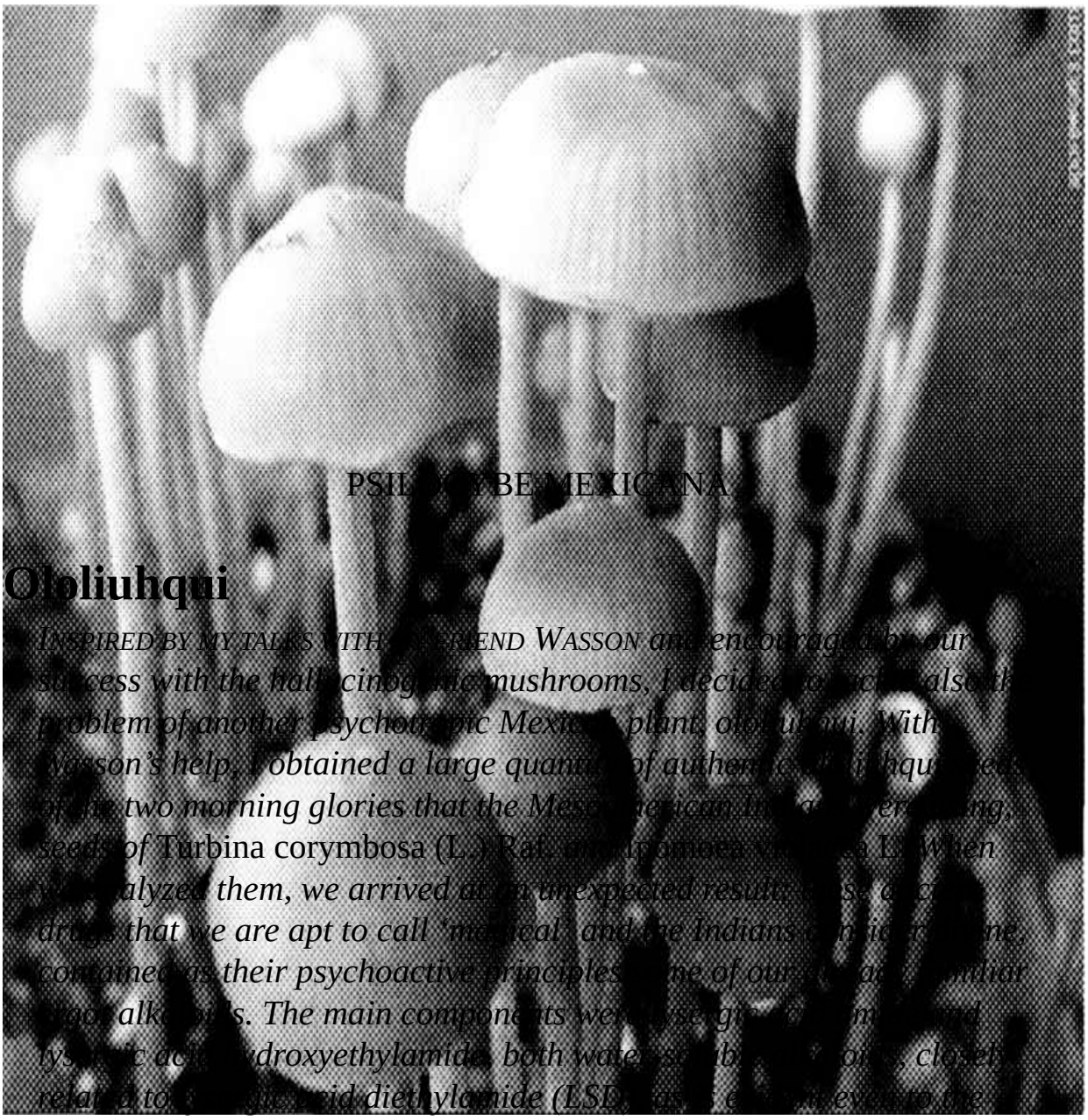


LYSERGIC ACID HYDROXYETHYLAMIDE

Another lysergic acid derivative that I synthesized in this context aiming to get an analeptic (that is, an agent with circulation and respiration-stimulating properties) was lysergic acid diethylamide. Pharmacological examination revealed a fairly strong uterotonic activity in this compound, nearly as strong as ergonovine.

Psilocybin

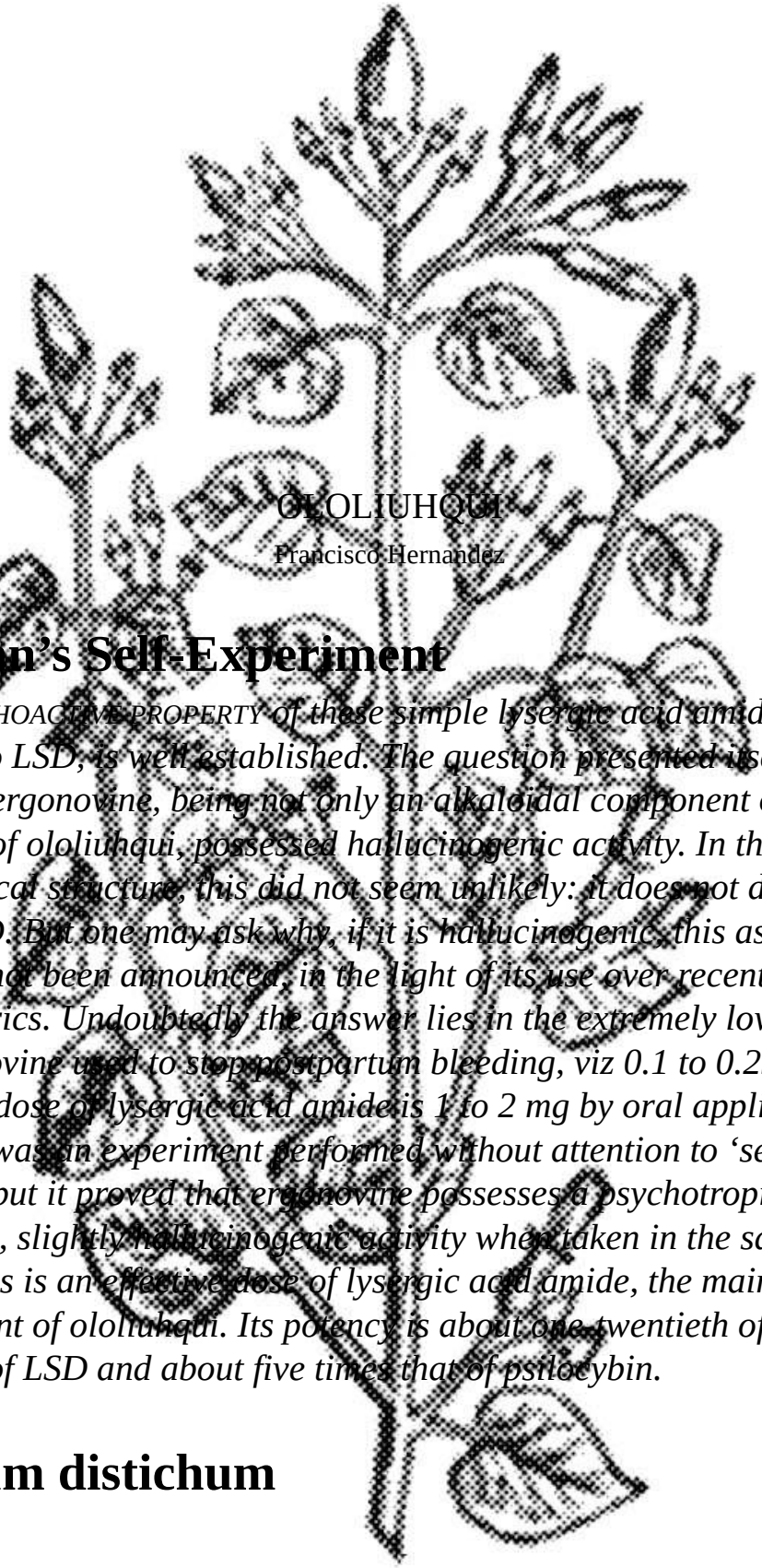
MY INTEREST in hallucinogenic agents, originating in 1943 from my work with LSD, brought me into personal contact with Gordon Wasson, pioneer ethnomycologist and also pioneer in the investigation of the ancient Mexican mushroom cult. From Roger Heim, then head of the Laboratoire de Cryptogamie and Director of the famous Musée Nationale d'Histoire Naturelle of Paris, whom Wasson invited to study and identify in the field his sacred mushrooms, I received samples of them for chemical analysis. With my laboratory assistant Hans Tscherter, I succeeded in isolating the hallucinogenic principles of the sacred Mexican mushrooms, which I named psilocybin and psilocin. With my colleagues of the Sandoz Research Laboratories, we succeeded in the elucidation of the chemical structure and the synthesis of psilocybin and psilocin.



PSILOCYBE MEXICANA

Ololiuhqui

INSPIRED BY MY TALKS WITH MY FRIEND WASSON and encouraged by our success with the hallucinogenic mushrooms, I decided to tackle also the problem of another psychotropic Mexican plant, ololiuhqui. With Wasson's help, I obtained a large quantity of authentic ololiuhqui seeds, of the two morning glories that the Mesoamerican Indians call tlitliltzin, seeds of Turbina corymbosa (L.) Raf. and Ipomoea violacea L. *When we analyzed them, we arrived at an unexpected result. These are the only drugs that we are apt to call 'magical' and the Indians consider divine, containing as their psychoactive principles some of our most familiar ergot alkaloids. The main components were lysergic acid amides, both water-soluble and closely related to lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), as well as, however, to the non-chemist from examining their chemical diagrams. Another constituent of the ololuhqui alkaloids was ergonovine, the uterotonic principle of ergot.*



OLOLIUHQUI

Francisco Hernandez

Hofmann's Self-Experiment

THE PSYCHOACTIVE PROPERTY of these simple lysergic acid amides, closely related to LSD, is well established. The question presented itself whether ergonovine, being not only an alkaloidal component of ergot but also of ololiuhqui, possessed hallucinogenic activity. In the light of its chemical structure, this did not seem unlikely: it does not differ much from LSD. But one may ask why, if it is hallucinogenic, this astonishing fact has not been announced, in the light of its use over recent decades in obstetrics. Undoubtedly the answer lies in the extremely low dosage of ergonovine used to stop postpartum bleeding, viz 0.1 to 0.25 mg. The effective dose of lysergic acid amide is 1 to 2 mg by oral application.

This was an experiment performed without attention to 'set and setting,' but it proved that ergonovine possesses a psychotropic, mood-changing, slightly hallucinogenic activity when taken in the same amount as is an effective dose of lysergic acid amide, the main constituent of ololiuhqui. Its potency is about one-twentieth of the potency of LSD and about five times that of psilocybin.

Paspalum distichum

THERE IS A FURTHER FINDING that may prove to be of utmost importance in considering Wasson's question. The main constituents of the Mexican morning-glory seeds are: (a) lysergic acid amide (= 'ergine'); and (b) lysergic acid hydroxyethylamide; and these are also the main alkaloids in ergot growing on the wild grass Paspalum distichum L. *This grass grows commonly all* around the Mediterranean basin and is often infected with Claviceps paspali. *F. Arcamone* et al. *were the first to discover these alkaloids in ergot of* P. distichum, *in 1960.*

Water-Soluble Toxins of Ergot

WITHIN THE KINDS OF ERGOT PRODUCED by the various species of the genus Claviceps *and its many hosts, cereals and wild grasses, types of ergot do exist that contain hallucinogenic alkaloids, the same alkaloids as in the Mexican hallucinogenic morning-glories. These alkaloids, mainly lysergic acid amide, lysergic acid hydroxyethylamide, and ergonovine, are soluble in water, in contrast to the non-hallucinogenic medicinally useful alkaloids of the ergotamine and ergotoxine type. With the techniques and equipment available in antiquity it was therefore easy to prepare a hallucinogenic extract from suitable kinds of ergot.*

What suitable kinds of ergot were accessible to the ancient Greeks? No rye grew there, but wheat and barley did and Claviceps purpurea *flourishes on both. We analyzed ergot of wheat and ergot of barley in our laboratory and they were found to contain basically the same alkaloids as ergot of rye, viz alkaloids of the ergotamine and ergotoxine group, ergonovine, and sometimes also traces of lysergic acid amide. As I said before, ergonovine and lysergic acid amide, both psychoactive, are soluble in water whereas the other alkaloids are not. As we all know, ergot differs in its chemical constituents according to its host grass and according to geography. We have no way to tell what the chemistry was of the ergot of barley or wheat raised on the Rarian plain in the 2nd millennium BCE. But it is certainly not pulling a long bow to assume that the barley grown there was host to an ergot containing, perhaps among others, the soluble hallucinogenic alkaloids. The famous Rarian plain was adjacent to Eleusis. Indeed this may well have led to the choice of Eleusis for Demeter's temple, and for*

the growth of the cluster of powerful myths surrounding them and Triptolemos that still exert their spell on us today.

An easier method still would have been to have recourse to some kind of ergot like that growing on the grass Paspalum distichum, *which contains only alkaloids that are hallucinogenic and which could even have been used directly in powder form. As I said before,* P. distichum *grows everywhere around the Mediterranean basin. During the many centuries when the Eleusinian Mysteries were thriving and holding the antique Greek world enthralled, may not the hierophants of Eleusis have been broadening their knowledge and improving their skills? For the Greek world as for us, the Mysteries are linked to Demeter and Kore, and they and Triptolemos are the famed mythical progenitors of cultivated wheat and barley. But in the course of time the hierophants could easily have discovered* Claviceps paspali growing on the grass Paspalum distichum. *Here they would be able to get their hallucinogen direct, straight and pure. But I mention this only as a possibility or a likelihood, and not because we need* P. distichum *to answer Wasson's question.*

> The separation of the hallucinogenic agents by simple water solution from the non-soluble ergotamine and ergotoxine alkaloids was well within the range of possibilities open to Early Man in Greece.
>
> ALBERT HOFMANN

> A species of ergot growing on darnel may have existed in ancient Greece that contained mainly hallucinogenic alkaloids of ergot such as we have found in ergot of Paspalum.
>
> ALBERT HOFMANN

> *The Lolium species* (L. temulentum *and* L. perenne) *are notoriously prey to the Claviceps fungus. The psychotropic reputation of darnel must therefore be attributed to its parasitic infection by ergot. Samples of ergot grown on* L. temulentum *and* L. perenne *collected in Germany, France, and Switzerland showed large variation in their alkaloidal composition. Some contained substantial amounts of ergonovine together with alkaloids of the ergotamine and ergotoxine group.*
>
> *In conclusion I now answer Wasson's question. The answer is yes; Early Man in ancient Greece could have arrived at a hallucinogen from ergot. He might have done this from ergot growing on wheat or barley.*

Shawn Eyer said,

> *The secret of what really happened at Eleusis remains one of the premier problems for historians of religion. That a trance state played an important role in the initiation is being suggested by more and more scholars. While there are various possible means of entering a mind-altering state of consciousness resembling that described in ancient sources, the use of a botanical stimulus is by far the most reliable. The model expressed by R. Gordon Wasson, Albert Hofmann and Carl Ruck must therefore be taken seriously. Their theory is the first truly realistic explanation for the most-documented aspect of the sacred mysteries: their profound, beneficial, and lasting effects upon the millions of initiates who, at one time or another, stood enraptured on the steps of the torch-lit Telesterion.* (Writing in *Alexandria: Journal for the Western Cosmological Traditions*.)

Interlude

DECADES HAVE PASSED SINCE Hofmann wrote the preceeding insights. Wasson died in 1986. Ruck and Wasson never replicated Hofmann's experience with ergonovine, but decided that Hofmann's dosage was too little. Jonathan Ott and Jeremy Bigwood verified Hoffmann's findings, taking doses up to 10 mg, but Ott later retracted this, claiming that muscle cramping impeded further experimentation. The effects, moreover, were the drowsiness and the somniferous state reported for darnel in antiquity.

The second suggestion of *Paspalum distichum,* commonly called "knotgrass," is still a possibility. The US Department of Agriculture reports how cows having grazed on it become ecstatic. The ancient darnel apparently could similarly be eaten as a quasi-regular regime without the dangerous toxicity caused by ergots, although it induced sleepiness and "darkened" eyesight, rather than the Eleusinian Illumination. *Paspalum,* however, although now a common weed throughout the Mediterranean, appears to have been imported into Europe from the New World after the Conquest. But since there are over two hundred varieties of ergot known today, the ancient ergot of darnel may have resembled that of *Paspalum.* Moreover, the ergot of *Paspalum, Claviceps paspali,* is known to infect 35 different grasses. Another host that produces only psychoactive alkaloids in its ergot is *Cynodon dactylon*, or Bermuda-grass, also called "devil-grass" and "dog's-tooth grass," a grass that is frequently found in Europe and that figures in herbal medical traditions, inducing, among other effects, insanity.

> The intoxication at 3.0 mg produced very mild visual alterations, lassitude and mild leg cramps. The effects tapered off in seven hours. At 5.0 mg, lassitude and cramps were more pronounced. The psychic effects were also more intense, particularly eidetic phenomena, but they were still mild, while the somatic effects were quite strong. Only at 10.0 mg were visual effects comparable to a threshold dose or LSD or psilocybin, but the physical effects (cramping) were already painful and debilitating. The experimenters were also in a kind of dreamy state, as the natural psychoactive ergoline alkaloids, apart from LSD, show a pronounced narcotic component.
>
> IVAN VALENCIC, YEARBOOK FOR ETHNOMEDICINE AND THE STUDY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

This dog's-tooth grass in Greek was called *agrostis* or the "hunter-plant," and its role in myth indicates an awareness of its psychoactive properties. Cronus was said to have sowed it in paradise on the Islands of the Blest,

where the horses of the Sun god Helios grazed upon it to get the strength needed for their flight through the air. It is also involved in the traditions about the sea demon Glaukos, who came from the town of “Flowers” or Anthedon. It was he who was responsible for its “hunter’s” name, since he discovered its magical properties while hunting in the mountains. He shot a rabbit, but found that it revived when he anointed it with this wild grass; thereupon, he tasted of it himself and was possessed by such a divine madness that he threw himself into the sea, in a fit of passion for the water maiden Hydne, and thus he became immortal. It was a similar passion that possessed Hylas, the “Woodsman,” when he fell into the embrace of the water maidens who surfaced from the pool beside which grew this grass. It was said that Glaukos could foretell the future, an art that he taught to Apollo himself. In fact, the Cumaean Sibyl was the daughter of Glaukos. It was Glaukos, moreover, who built the Argo, the first ship ever made and the one that carried an assemblage of heroes on the primordial voyage to the magical garden of the witch Medea to capture the Golden Fleece for Jason. The masthead of the ship was prophetic.

The real breakthrough is the discovery of Albert Hofmann, the distinguished Swiss chemist who gave the world LSD, only to have his “child of sorrows” rejected. He establishes beyond the shadow of a doubt, I think, that the drink served during the initiation rites at the Eleusinian Mysteries contained ergot. This—and no theatrical effects, as often assumed—fully accounts for the marvelous visions of another world that made this religious experience so unique. This book opens up new perspective for all serious students of the Classics and ancient culture.

GEORGE LUCK PROFESSOR OF CLASSICS, EMERITUS
JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

The story, however, is not over. Ergot from a plethora of grasses clearly has the requisite entheogen for the Eleusinian vision, but the Homeric

formula is explicit that the grain in the potion is barley. Furthermore, although Hofmann placed the awareness of ergot's toxicity as late the 17th century and more recently it has been delayed until the mid 19th century, the Robigalia festival of the Romans and the ergot sieve of the Greeks would surely indicate that the ancients knew of something special and potentially dangerous about the ergotized kernels and also knew how to selected them out. It is all still a matter of recovering the ancient lore that will allow us to access it.

14

Rust

CIVILIZATION AND THE ARTS OF CULTIVATION were continually in need of renewal, to found them again upon the healthy accord and reconciliation with their more primitive origins, the fertilizing source in the chthonic realm from which they grew into the Olympian age. If the primitive were not given its place in the evolving Grand Design of the world, there would be no place for mankind, which, by virtue of its mortality, participates in the non-Olympian contamination of the tomb. The dishonored earth, instead of supporting the foods of life, would yield only poisons and sterility from the rotting dead, whose angry spirits would hound the living with wild delusions. Such is the threat made by the loathsome and despised Erinyes or Furies of Aeschylus's *Oresteia*, the maddening, female Hellhounds, whose presence pollutes Apollo's Delphic temple. The priestess likens them to the Harpies who defiled Phineus's food with their rotting excrement.

> Not women, but Gorgons I mean, nor can I liken them to pictures
> I've seen of the Gorgons. I once saw them depicted bringing Phineus
> his dinner. They are without wings, black, and totally disgusting. And
> they are snoring, not with pretended breathings. And from their eyes
> they weep a loveless pouring.
>
> AESCHYLUS EUMENIDES, VERSES 48 SQ.

When at first they are dishonored in the civilized institutions of the court at Athens, they threaten to drip tears of poison from their wounded hearts, polluting the earth with the stoppage of growth of both crops and mankind, a leafless fungal poison spread over the land.

Athena, however, cajoles them into accepting an honored place beneath the earth, and the threatened curse becomes a joyous benediction of fertility for the city. Instead of the fearsome Furies, they change their name to the Eumenides, the "Benevolent Sisters."

> Poison, poison, a drop in retaliation for my suffering heart upon the land, from it spreading a leafless, childless lichenous fungal blight, a defilement destroying life.
>
> AESCHYLUS EUMENIDES, VERSES 812 SQ.

Bread and Wine

SUCH RECONCILIATION INDICATES the essential participation of primitivism in an evolving world where humans are to have a role. In terms of agrarian realities, mankind, by virtue of its mortality, is contaminated with the rotting dead matter it must slaughter or harvest for food, a putrefaction that is both the potential cause of pestilence and yet the honored, stinking nutriment that sustains the generations rooted upon the earth. The affinity of the dead and their still living counterpart can also be sensed in the culinary arts, another evolutionary sign of civilized mankind's progress from primitivism. The "ripening" of fruits, by which they are softened toward rottenness, was a kind of digestion, a process that was hastened, in its refined way, by cooking or baking, which in Greek is "softening and ripening." The growth of molds and fungi upon the corpse is both an indication of the corruption of the tomb and an indication of the possible ways to control and reverse its destructive activity.

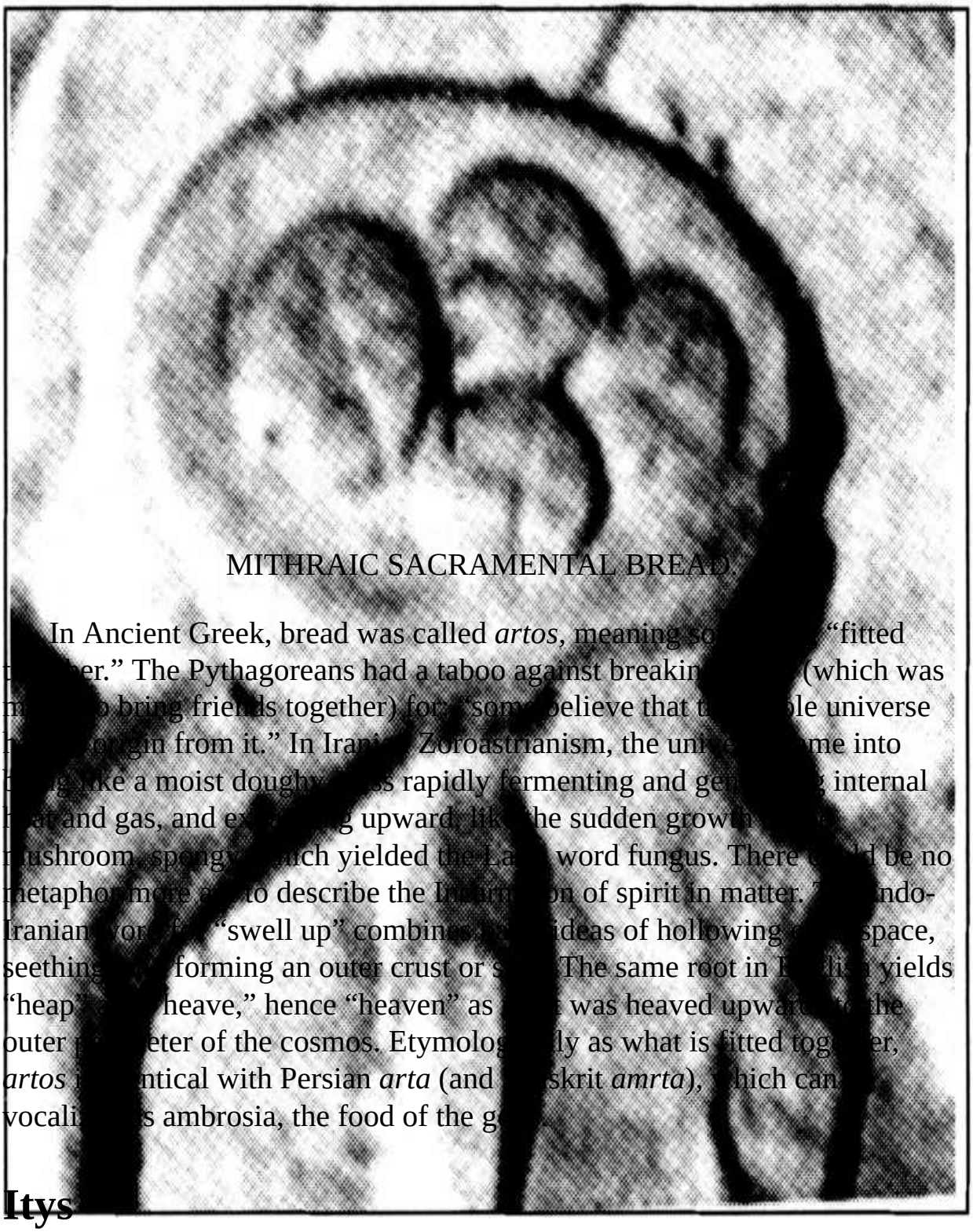
The House of Hades traditionally was covered over with mold. Both Demeter and Dionysus, with their respective dry and liquid foodstuffs,

demonstrate a reversal of the normal molding putrefaction of dead matter. Leavened bread is lightened by the fungal activity of yeast. The dough, which could be expected to rot, instead becomes fragrant with the growth of the fungi, enlivening and animating the dead mass with the air of life; the manner of preparation would have been like sour dough, where the grain mixture is left alone, but instead of putrefying, it catches the ambient fungi that reverse the degenerative process. The same thing happens with the juice of the grape, which instead of rotting, roils and digests with the activity of the fermenting yeasts.

> Let no wind blow that harms the trees – this is my blessing, no blazing heat blinding plants, no everlasting sterile plague.
>
> AESCHYLUS EUMENIDES, VERSES 938 SQ.

Heaven's Loaf

"BREAD" AS THE SACRAMENTAL FOOD is inextricably involved in metaphors of fungal growth. It was symbolic of the Cosmos, hence made spherical and incised with the Greek chi (X) indicative of the crossings of the bands of the celestial equinoctial and the solar zodiacal elliptic, easily assimilated in the Greek Orthodox Church as the crucifix of the Savior.



MITHRAIC SACRAMENTAL BREAD.

In Ancient Greek, bread was called *artos,* meaning so[illegible] "fitted t[illegible]er." The Pythagoreans had a taboo against breakin[illegible] (which was m[illegible] to bring friends together) for "som[illegible] believe that t[illegible]le universe h[illegible] origin from it." In Irani[illegible] Zoroastrianism, the uni[illegible]me into b[illegible]ng like a moist doughy [illegible]ss rapidly fermenting and ge[illegible]g internal h[illegible]at and gas, and ex[illegible]g upward like the sudden growth [illegible] mushroom, spongy [illegible]uch yielded the La[illegible] word fungus. There [illegible]d be no metaphor more a[illegible] to describe the In[illegible]n of spirit in matter. [illegible] Indo-Iranian [illegible] "swell up" combines [illegible] ideas of hollowing [illegible] space, seething [illegible] forming an outer crust or s[illegible] The same root in E[illegible]lish yields "heap" [illegible] heave," hence "heaven" as [illegible] was heaved upward [illegible] the outer p[illegible]eter of the cosmos. Etymolog[illegible]ly as what is fitted tog[illegible]er, *artos* i[illegible]ntical with Persian *arta* (and [illegible]skrit *amrta*), [illegible]hich can[illegible] vocali[illegible]s ambrosia, the food of the g[illegible]

Itys

THE WORD FOR WINE IN GREEK is *(w)oinos,* cognate with "wine" and its various variations in Latin and the modern European languages. Since the migrating Indo-Europeans did not originate viticulture, their northern

homeland being unsuitable for the cultivation of the vine, we might assume that the word for wine was derived from the languages of the Mediterranean peoples they encountered upon coming to the Greek lands. On the other hand, its widespread occurrence in the later Indo-European languages may indicate that the word for wine had an Indo-European origin -which is probably the case. They applied a word of their own to designate the new intoxicant as the Mediterranean version of their traditional drink. If that were the situation, we might ask what is the Indo-European etymology of *(w)oinos.* It can be derived from a very ancient Indo-European word, ultimately related to the Latin word of the "grape-vine" *vitis* and the Greek *(w)itys,* the word for a "circular rim, as of a wheel supported by its spokes" which is a common ideogram for the mushroom cap viewed from its gilled underside. The Indo-Europeans employed the word for their fungal intoxicant from their homeland to the new intoxicant they found upon their arrival into more southern climates; or more exactly, they applied one of its metaphors, since the plant itself was too sacred to be named. In Greek mythological traditions, Itys appears with Dionysian connotations as the butchered son of the maenadic sisters, Procne and Philomela, whose story involves the pattern of possession and abduction by a chthonic spirit, as in the myth of Persephone.

The Missing Seed

THE ABDUCTION OF THE LESSER MYSTERY involved wild plants, symbolized by the fleabane and the mushroom, the later being the wildest of growths in lacking any apparent seed and defying cultivation. Both plants, moreover, were linked in being the bane of insects, which are interchangeable symbolically as to species and generally were depicted as tiny flying souls of the departed. The common name of the *muscaria* is fly-agaric, from the belief that it kills flies, whereas the insects are actually attracted to its psychoactive juice, which induces only a death-like swoon from which they later recover.

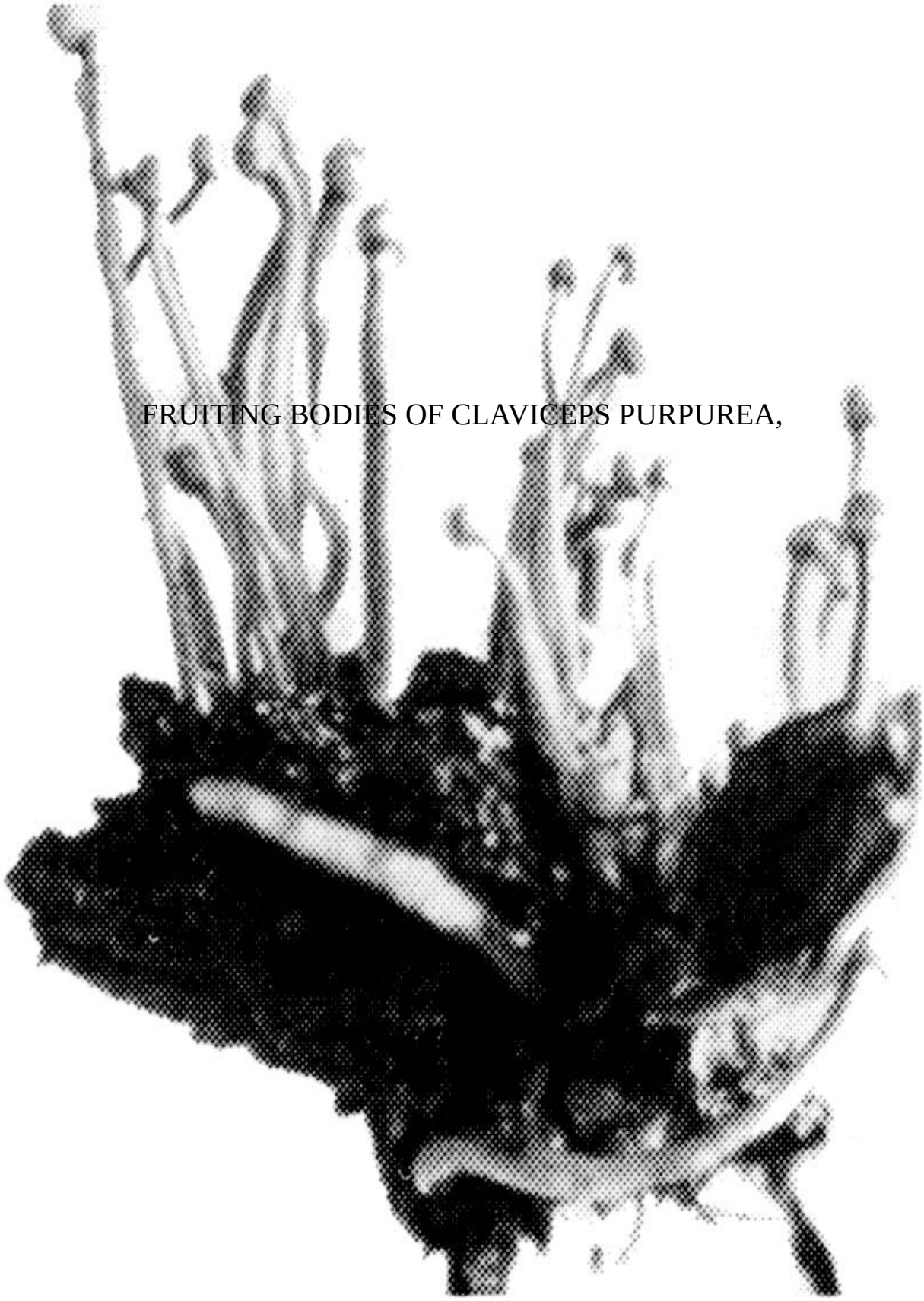
INSECT SOULS S[illegible]ARMING ARO[illegible]S IN T[illegible]E BO[illegible]F CHARON

The Gre[illegible]ery, like the contro[illegible]ss t[illegible] yield read of D[illegible] the wine of Dion su[illegible] tri[illegible] cultivatio[illegible] conquered putref[illegible]tio[illegible] by enlis[illegible]g mushroo[illegible]got-infested [illegible]rnels b[illegible]ot tho[illegible] fferent p[illegible]n the host, [illegible]t en[illegible]ed [illegible]haps s[illegible] e sun. T[illegible] com[illegible]ine [illegible]e wil[illegible] fle[illegible] he barle[illegible] rototypic[illegible]vation. T[illegible]balanc[illegible] fur[illegible] is perfect[illegible] eabane was [illegible]n abortifac[illegible] and [illegible]e ergo[illegible]ing drug in harmacopoeia of the mi[illegible]e. The mushi[illegible]n is the perfect[illegible] ediator between the t[illegible]nd in fact, the [illegible]ested kernels w[illegible] pecial significance, s[illegible]hen they fall [illegible]e ground in the onditi[illegible]s, the myc[illegible] any mushroom, send up the frui[illegible] e characteristi[illegible]mshape and large enough to be vi[illegible] naked ey[illegible]

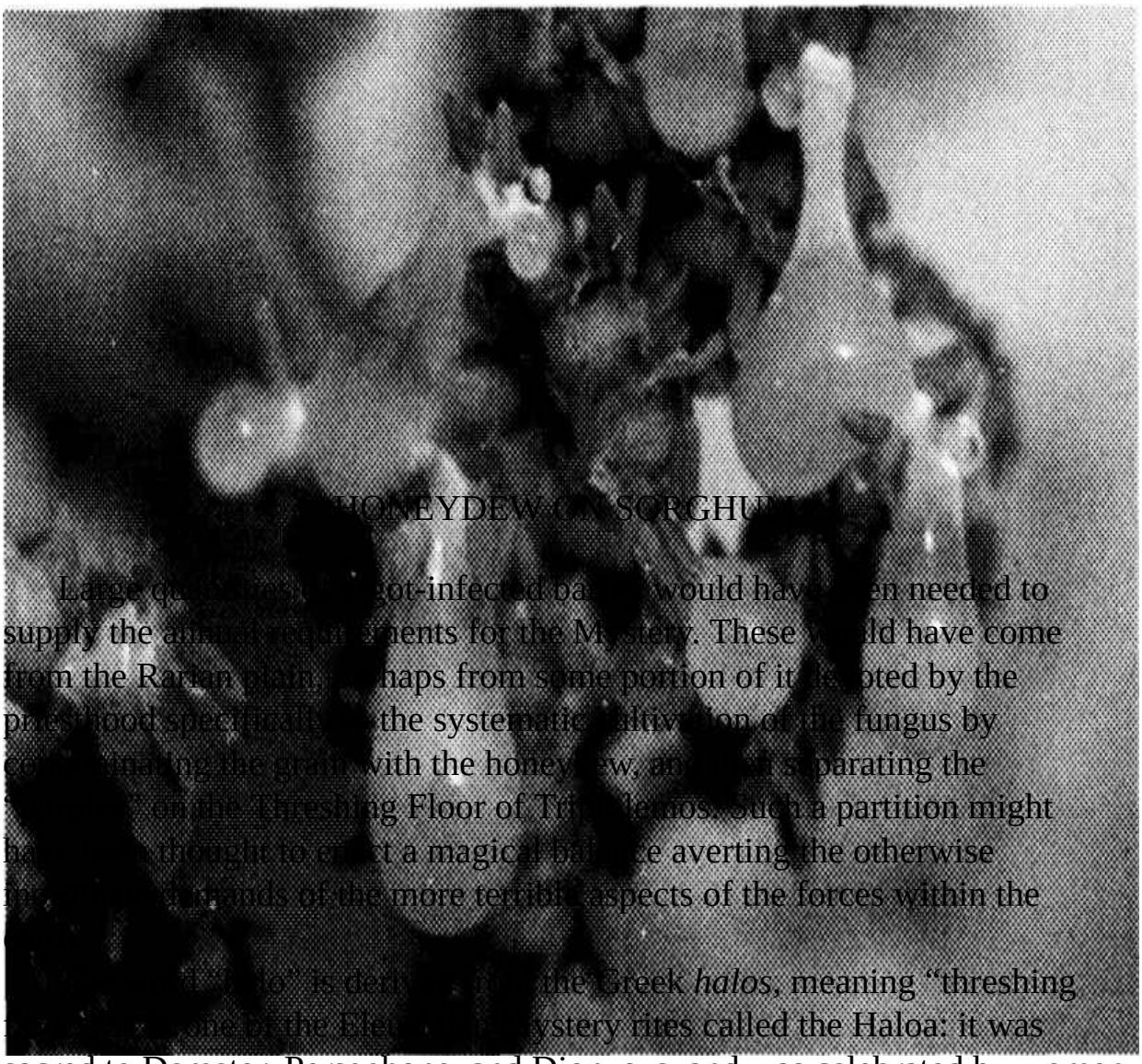
[illegible]pear to be the missing seed of the mu[illegible] [illegible] of grain. It would have been noticed a[illegible] [illegible] viscous honeydew that is similarly attra[illegible]e[illegible] it [illegible] be just the sap of the grain exuded when the insects [illegible]pre[illegible]

[illegible]nt of papyrus preserves a portion of a comedy by Eupolis [illegible] the *Demes*, performed shortly after the great scandal of Profanation [illegible] guilty were [illegible]

indeed specifically accused for using the Sacred Drink for recreational purposes, and that it was barley and not another grain or grass that was the host for the ergot, which, as it now appears, is the only possible source for a psychoactive agent worthy of risking the extreme dangers of illegal use. In the comedy, an informer explains to a judge how he had come upon someone who had obviously been drinking the *kykeon* since he had barley groats on his moustache. The accused had bribed the informer to say that it was simply a barley porridge and not the potion that he had drunk. The comedian, in fact, puns, implying that the “crumbs of barley” were actually “purples of barley,” proving, for those who knew the Mystery, that the forbidden ingredient was ergots of barley.



FRUITING BODIES OF CLAVICEPS PURPUREA,



HONEYDEW ON SORGHUM

Large quantities of ergot-infected barley would have been needed to supply the annual requirements for the Mystery. These would have come from the Rarian plain, perhaps from some portion of it devoted by the priesthood specifically to the systematic cultivation of the fungus by contaminating the grain with the honeydew, and then separating the [illegible] on the Threshing Floor of Triptolemos. Such a partition might have been thought to effect a magical balance averting the otherwise inevitable demands of the more terrible aspects of the forces within the [illegible]

[illegible] "Haloa" is derived from the Greek *halos*, meaning "threshing floor," and one of the Eleusinian Mystery rites called the Haloa: it was sacred to Demeter, Persephone, and Dionysus, and was celebrated by women in mid winter. It involved abundant drinking, obscene language, and the veneration of sexual symbols, bringing together the proper women with their prostitute sisters, and it was considered a mystery. It's date in December, however, indicates that it can have nothing to do with the harvest, which would occur in May, nor with the growth of ergot, which cannot develop before the fruiting sheaf develops, around April. Instead, it corresponds to the Dionysian revels in the rural villages, when the still fermenting effervescent *vin bourru* or "boorish wine" was drunk. The female obscenities of the Haloa are matched by the phallic parades in the same month. The fact that the circular shape of the threshing floor came to represent the radiance of divine enlightenment (as well as the auras around the sun and moon)

suggests the visionary nature of such threshing rites. In Classical traditions, the *halos* came to represent the apotheosis of Dionysus, incarnate in human form as Triptolemos. The dancing circle or orchestra of the Dionysian theater is commonly derived from the threshing floor, even though the dances performed there were rectilinear, instead of circular.

A Potion of Rust

THERE IS A MYTHICAL TRADITION about a magical potion whose main ingredient is the rust scraped off a knife embedded in a sacred oak, the tree that is the common host for the fly-agaric. Melampous or “Black-foot” was a great shaman and founder of an important family of hereditary prophets. He had received his gift when he raised a nest of serpents that he found in an oak tree; they repaid him by licking his ears while he slept, and when he awoke, he discovered that he could understand the speech of animals and birds. Much later, he found himself imprisoned and heard certain woodworms in the roof of his cell saying that they had almost finished eating through the main beam. He convinced his jailor to move him to another cell, just before the roof fell. On the basis of this proof of his abilities, he was asked to solve the problem of the impotency of the king’s young son. A bird, who had witnessed the event, told him that the boy had been frightened by his father when he approached him with a bloody knife in his hand while gelding rams. The father had comforted the terrified boy and had thrust the offending knife into the sacred oak, where it had remained, forgotten and rusting. Melampous retrieved the knife, and cured the boy with a potion of its rust dissolved in wine. This was the same shaman who cured the daughters of Proitos of their madness. They had imagined that they were turning into cows in heat, even growing scabby white patches on their reddening hides, in which condition, resembling the characteristic bull-mushroom, they had pulled the hero Perseus apart, limb from limb.

This interpretation seems to solve the Mystery at last. The solution is simple and elegant, like all good solutions, and leads us to wonder why it hadn’t been hit upon sooner. Thanks to Wasson’s perspicacity,

> we have here yet another astonishing chapter in the history of ethnomycology which for the first time places the sacred mushroom in our own cultural past.
>
> JONATHAN OTT PHARMACOTHEON.

It doesn't take much sensitivity to mythopoeia to grasp that the rust is the restorative complement to the wild emasculating estral abandon of the maddened cow maidens.

Lizard Boy

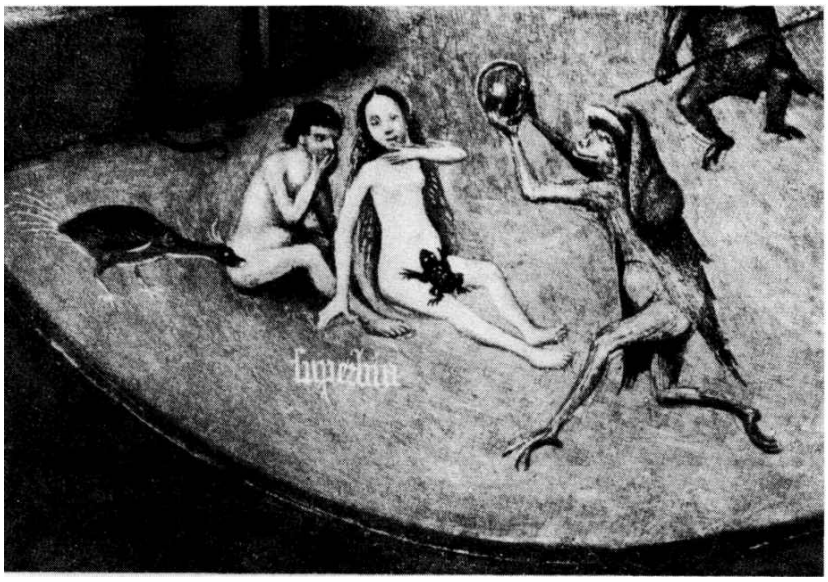
THERE IS A BIZARRE VERSION of Demeter's drinking of the sacred potion that connects the scabby remnants of the mushroom's cap with the little creature emerging from Baubo's vulva. It comes from Ovid, who as a poet of the Hellenistic Age would have invented nothing not previously documented, but would also have reveled in his display of arcane knowledge. When Demeter drank the potion, there was a saucy foul-mouthed little creature there who criticized her greediness for the drink. She splashed its remnants upon his face with its bits of barley kernels. His skin immediately absorbed the toxin and became spotted, and where he had arms he now had legs, as he metamorphosed into a little lizard, and as Baubo weeping tried to touch him, he ran (back into her) to hide, taking the name of "starred" from the drops of the barley grouts. Lizards and the like are a source for the psychoactive bufotonine, hence the metaphor of the toadstool, and the strange story suggests that the barley grouts and the scabby mushroom's cap are dichotomously involved in the potion that afforded transit through the opened doorway. The "toad" is metaphoric around the world for the vulva.

AGAMA STELLIO LIZARD

Thus, for example, among the Kogi people of the Colombian [illegible] Nevada, the toad symbolizes the feminine sexual organ in an aggressive and insatiable sense. The same word designates both “toad” and “vulva,” and a man may refer to his wife as “my toad.”

The old woman wondered and wept, and, trying to touch the creature, it ran from her and searched out a place to hide. It has a name fitting for its offence, stellio, a newt, its body starred with various spots.

OVID METAMORPHOSES, V, VERSES 460 SQ.



TOAD AS VULVA DETAIL IN SEVEN DEADLY SINS BY HIERONYMUS BOSCH

Manna

THE MUSHROOM, ergot, grain, and magical food form a complex. The common word for “mushroom” in Modern Greek is *manitari,* from the ancient *amanita*, of unknown origin, but perhaps assimilated from the Hebrew manna, which is probably an intentionally incorrect vocalization the MN consonants, the same nasal labial position of pursed lips that yielded the minimal sound of a mystery well kept. It supposedly represents the question of the Israelites, “What (food is this)?” when it magically appeared in the desert. The answer is this food is “What,” but you should vocalize it differently. It was the bread of angels, heaven’s grain, amber in color, a spring flowing from the Tree of Life with the Water of Life, like honeydew, a field of apples, and it looked like a one-legged table; by eating of it, one saw god and accessed the power of angels. In ancient Greek, manna is homonymous with a word for “granules”; and in Latin, with a word for “grain” and the hardened juice of a plant, like the dried honeydew of an ergotized kernel.

To the victor I will give some hidden manna, and to him shall I give a white pebble, and on the pebble written the new name that no one knows but he who takes the pebble.

REVELATION 2. 17

with Peter Webster

15

Mixing the *Kykeon* Anew

ERGOT PRODUCES A COMPLEX and diverse range of toxins according to geographic region and seasonal climate, and the host *Graminaceae* on which it grows, among other factors. Knowledge of ergot's peculiarities and the specialized procedures required to extract the medicinal or visionary components therein has always been an element in the folkloric pharmacopoeia.

The chemistry of ergot may even hold a few secrets yet to be explained by modern science. The ergonovine extracted by simple water solution appears not to be sufficiently effective. Self-tests by several researchers with pure chemically synthesized ergonovine maleate or methylergonovine could not conclusively replicate Hofmann's visionary experience at dosages low enough to avoid unpleasant physical side effects. Ergonovine, moreover, is a minor and quite variable component of ergot, making it doubtful that a psychoactive *kykeon* could have been prepared reliably for nearly two thousand successive years.

With the help of Peter Webster, we carry the investigation a step further. Supporting evidence for his proposal has come from other experts in the chemistry of psychoactive substances: Daniel M. Perrine, of Loyola College and author of *The Chemistry of Mind-Altering Drugs*; David Nichols, of Purdue University and co-founder of the Heffter Research Institute; and Vladimír Krín, of the Czech Institute of Microbiology and an authority on

the chemistry of ergot; as well as Albert Hofmann; and Alexander “Sasha” Shulgin, the creator of hundreds of psychoactive substances.

In what follows, Peter Webster’s words are in italics:

> *LONG-ENDURING MYSTERIES may sometimes acquire a certain charm, or even charisma, something we would normally only associate with a personality. Indeed, when a notorious mystery is finally solved, we may feel emotionally distraught as if an old friend had suddenly left us forever.*
>
> *The messenger that brings news of a mystery’s demise may therefore not be believed; he may even be dismissed as a fool for having dared to tread where so many heroes had explored but come back empty-handed. How dare this presumptuous upstart try to take our beloved mystery from us!*

Partial Hydrolysis

THE COMMON NUCLEUS to the ergot alkaloids is lysergic acid, and they more or less fall into two categories: the more toxic non-water soluble peptide alkaloids and the water-soluble derivatives, the ones that appear to display greater psychoactive potential; of these the most promising are ergine (chemically synthesized as *d-lysergic acid amide,* or lysergamide), and ergonovine (*d-lysergic acid-L-2-propanolamide*). In combining lysergic acid with amines (a class of basic compounds whose simplest member is ammonia), Hofmann produced a series of partially-synthetic compounds, the 25th in the series being given the laboratory designation of LSD-25, (German Lyserg-säure-diäthylamid) or lysergic-acid-diethyamide. Its effectiveness as an uterotonic remedy, however, was less than other compounds already produced, and it was dropped from the laboratory’s schedule, although the researchers noted that the experimental rats appeared restless during narcosis.

Hofmann discovered the psychoactive properties only five years later on the day of his famous bicycle ride. The substance was marketed under the trade name of *Delysid,* for use in psychotherapeutics and the treatment of the terminally ill, until what Hofmann had called a “not unpleasant inebriation,”

although at times also totally terrifying, led to the wide-spread misuse of the substance.

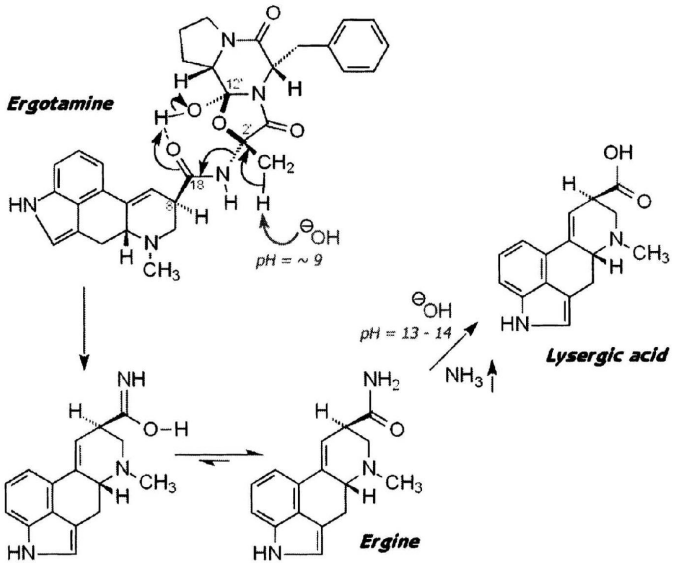
> In our hearts we love our mysteries, and often really do not want them solved, especially if that solution turns out to be something that might well have been discovered long ago, something quite simple that might reveal that our old friend was a bit of a trickster.
>
> PETER WEBSTER

> This process finally provides the missing link for how the perparation of the kykeon might have been accomplished. With quite a simple procedure, the entire alkaloid content of ergot could be converted to ergine.
>
> PETER WEBSTER.

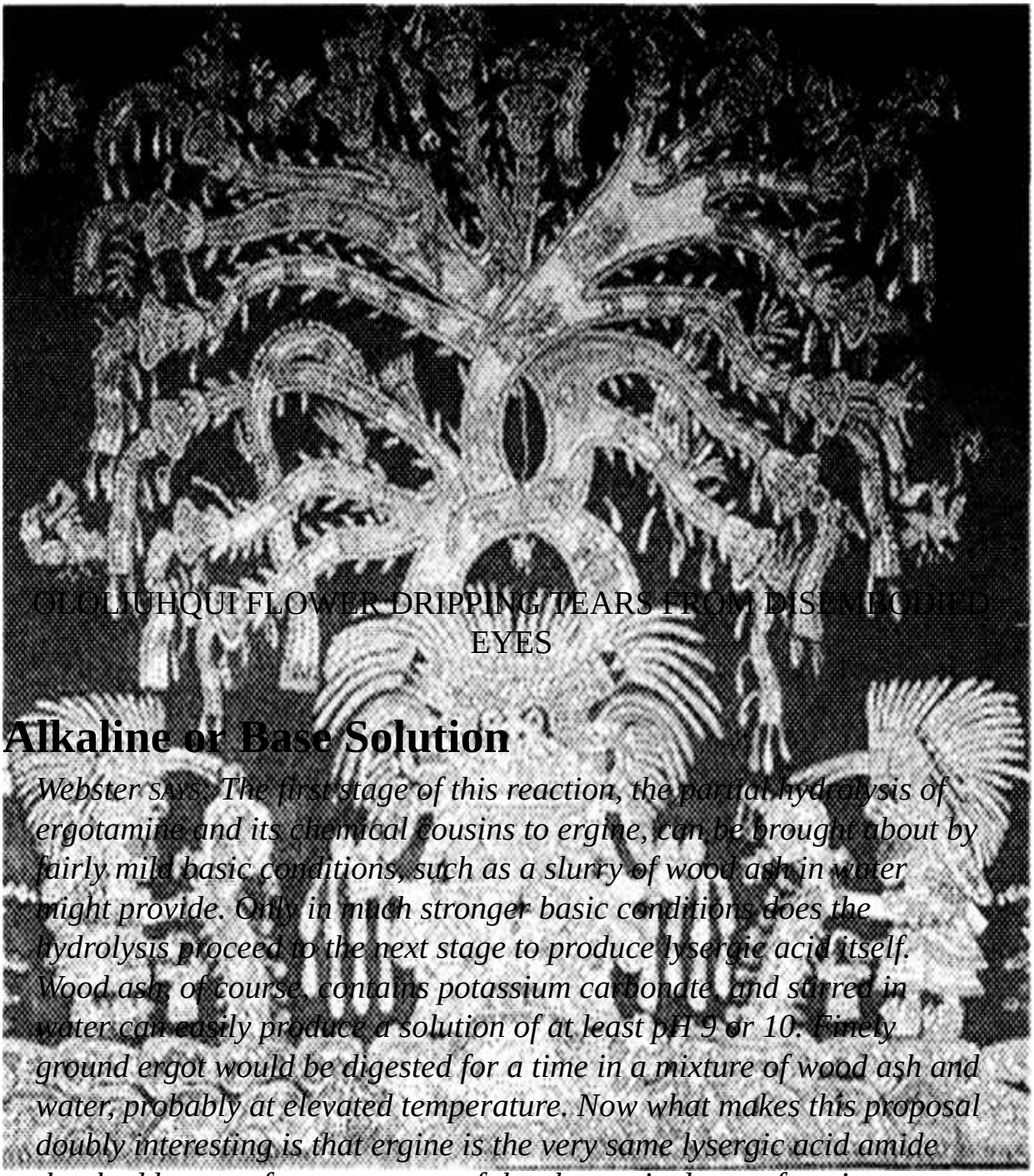
Hofmann's suggestion that ergonovine might have been the secret ingredient of the *kykeon* depended on the solubility of the compound in water. There is, however, another process involving water that is of interest– the **chemical addition of water to a molecule**. This is termed hydrolysis: a chemical reaction in which water reacts with a compound to produce other compounds, splitting it into fragments, with the hydroxyl group being incorporated in one fragment and the hydrogen atom in the other. A common example is the transmutation by hydrolysis of starch to glucose.

Webster remembered research from the 1930s about how lysergic acid and other compounds were first isolated from reaction mixtures of ergot alkaloids. In an effort to elucidate the molecular structure of these compounds, chemists had been studying how the toxic ergopeptine alkaloids were cleaved into various fragments. One of these reactions was the

hydrolysis of the ergot alkaloids in a basic or alkaline solution. Certain aspects of this work have apparently been all but forgotten ever since. What the experiments showed was that the predominant alkaloids of ergot, the toxic and ergotism-producing ergopeptines such as ergotamine, could be partially hydrolyzed to ergine rather than completely hydrolyzed to lysergic acid, depending on the conditions of the reaction.



HYDROLYSIS OF ERGOTAMINE TO ERGINE AND THEN LYSERGIC ACID



OLOLIUHQUI FLOWER-DRIPPING TEARS FROM DISEMBODIED EYES

Alkaline or Base Solution

Webster says: The first stage of this reaction, the partial hydrolysis of ergotamine and its chemical cousins to ergine, can be brought about by fairly mild basic conditions, such as a slurry of wood ash in water might provide. Only in much stronger basic conditions does the hydrolysis proceed to the next stage to produce lysergic acid itself. Wood ash, of course, contains potassium carbonate, and stirred in water can easily produce a solution of at least pH 9 or 10. Finely ground ergot would be digested for a time in a mixture of wood ash and water, probably at elevated temperature. Now what makes this proposal doubly interesting is that ergine is the very same lysergic acid amide that had become famous as one of the shamanic drugs of ancient Central America. Ergine, the simplest lysergic acid amide, was the principle alkaloid of the seed of either of two morning-glory vines, called ololiuhqui *by the* Aztecs *of ancient Mexico.*

To avoid a basic solution that would be too caustic to drink, the alkalinity could be neutralized by allowing the processed ergot solution to stand for a few days exposed to the air so that it would absorb

enough carbon dioxide to convert the potassium carbonate to relatively harmless potassium bicarbonate. Or, acidic or soured wine, which is to say vinegar, or even any fruit juice, including grape juice, containing citric ascorbic and tartaric acids, would effectively neutralize the solution; although wine itself is prohibited, spoiled wine might be a way of commemorating Demeter's grief for the abduction at Nysa.

Although the US government strictly limits access to ergots for fear of the illegal conversion to LSD, and persons involved in studying the chemistry of ergots fall under heavy suspicion, ergotamine is available combined with caffeine under various trade names as a prescription vasoconstrictor medication to treat migraine headaches.

The Ashes of Mortality

THE ASHES FOR THE ALKALINE WATER would have significance within the total Eleusinian complex. Such ashes, perlash or potash, called *tephra* and *spodos* in Greek, had medicinal properties involved in "sight" as an eye salve at least as early as Aristotle. They also are "purifying": an alkaline fluid called *konia* ("ash-water") was used for washing. There was also a *konia* derived from holy water and the ashes from sacrificial burned animal victims that reportedly had medicinal properties. Such ashes would consist of the burnt remains of the hide, bones, and fat of the slaughtered animal, mixed with the wood ash from the fire required to set them alight. This bone ash Holy Water is of particular relevance for Eleusis.

The Melampous myth of the rust potion, moreover, indicates a transition from human offerings to animal sacrifice; hence the boy's extreme fear of the sacrificial knife in his father's hand. Fiery immolation of human so-called volunteers and funeral pyres are frequent in the traditions of Eleusis.

And in particular, Demeter, before teaching the Mystery, had laid the Queen's son Demophoön, lulled to sleep with poppy juice, nightly in the hearth like a log to burn off his mortality. This event was commemorated each year by the bizarre rite of the boy (or later maiden) from the hearth, who was the only child among the initiates and had a special role to perform at the initiation. The secret agency of the potash would symbolize the mediation between body and soul and the reconciliation of chthonic and

celestial realms. The goddess Persephone symbolized the transmutation of destructive fire to the fire of regeneration.

The Water-Priest called *Hydranos* was responsible for the water for the ceremony of purification. It was he apparently who would supply the alkaline water for the mixing of the potion. He probably also asperged the initiates with this magical Holy Water, a rite still preserved in the Roman Church, a water that in the Eleusinian rite, not only purified and improved eyesight, but was compounded of the ashes of the sacrificial offerings to the gods. A similar sanctity of the sacrificial ashes persists in the Roman Church in the preservation of the burnt palms of Palm Sunday for the next year's Ash Wednesday ritual.

> These are not ashes to be simply disposed of as one would ordinary hearth ashes; they partake of the sacral nature of the offering, and it is natural to attempt to incorporate them in some further sacral function.
>
> DANIEL M. PERRINE

Secret Offering from the Hyperboreans

A SIMILAR TRANSITION FROM THE OFFERING of human victims to the pacified evolution of the rite occurred on the island of Delos, where the god Apollo and his twin Artemis were reborn into their Olympian personae. Each year the Greek cities sent the god an offering of sheaves of grain, the first fruits of the year's crop, harvested before it had completely ripened, together with a troupe of twice seven dancers from the best of families, like Demophoön, as only would be befitting as gifts to the deity, seven adolescent boys and seven maidens, who would dance around the altar that marked the spot where the twins had been born into their new identity as the children of Zeus.

Euripides himself as a youth had taken the journey. The original nature of this rite as an offering of human victims was commemorated by the fact that the dancers now in this pacified version were merely flagellated as they

danced, and the identity of original psychoactive sacrament involved in their voluntary surrender to the god was masked under its transmutation into the sacred olive tree, which the dancers bit as they danced around it.

The rite went back to its first performance around 1500 BCE when the Athenian hero Theseus and his troupe of dancers, upon their return from Crete, celebrated their defeat of the Minotaur and their liberation from the deadly sacramental dance with the bull in the sanctuary of Knossos. The same ship on which Theseus first sailed was carefully preserved a thousand years later, each rotten plank meticulously replaced with new timber, piece by piece, over the course of a millennium. During the sailing of this embassy of dancers to Delos, nothing was allowed to remind the god of his former role in taking human offerings. Thus it was that Socrates spent enough time in prison for the conversations recorded as the Platonic dialogues of the *Crito* and *Phaedo* since he ordinarily would have been executed immediately after the adverse judgment of the trial. But the ship with the dancers had just set sail and had encountered stormy seas, and no public execution could be enacted while it was still on route.

Among these offerings of unripened first fruits of the grain harvest, symbolic of its pre-hybridized primitive antecedent, was a secret offering from the Hyperboreans, carefully wrapped in a sheaf of grain. It commemorated the tradition that the Hyperborean maidens who had first arrived with their offering of first fruits had died in the sanctuary, where their graves were still honored.

But the people who tell us by far the most about the Hyperboreans are the Delians; for according to them, certain sacred offerings wrapped in sheaves of grain come from the Hyperboreans into Scythia, whence they are taken over by the neighboring peoples in succession until they reach Delos. This is how it happens now, but on the first occasion the two maidens never returned. Later, when the Hyperboreans found that their messengers did not return, they changed their plans, disliking that they might always lose whomever they sent, and they began the practice of wrapping the offerings in sheaves and taking them to the border, with instructions to their

neighbors to see that they conveyed them to their destination by a process of relay, from one nation to the next.

HERODOTUS 4. 33 SQ.

Now the Hyperboreans no longer existed in this world. They were a construct of mythopoeia, the remembrance of the homeland in the Asiatic high plateau from which the Indo-Europeans with their original fungal Soma sacrament had migrated. If one were to trace the route for the transference of this secret offering from tribe to tribe on its route to Delos, the first historically documented people beyond the further realms of mythical imagination would have been the Scythians, and it is from them that the actual offering must have originated, as it materialized into an actual plant from the fantasies of mythical tradition.

Beyond the Scythians, there were the One-eyed Arimaspians, a personification of the visionary fungal people with the disembodied eye, and the griffins, a mythical beast with the head and wings of an eagle and the body of a lion, depicted with a mushroom knob on their beaks. It was they who dug up the hidden gold of the Soma sacrament. As for the Scythians themselves, they still in historical times wore a golden mushroom disk on their belts in commemoration of their descent from the mermaid nymph of Scythia and the hero Herakles. This was the most ancient occurrence of an event that persisted into medieval lore as the encounter of a knight with a mushroom fairy known as Melusina, the “Mother of Illumination.” And she was the way that the pagan Goddess continued to empower the noble families of Europe after their conversion to Christianity. She was claimed as the ancestor for the Plantagenets of England and all the royalty of France after Charlemagne, except for the Bonapartes.

This secret offering from the Hyperboreans, hidden in the sheaves of grain, was a mushroom and most probably the *Amanita muscaria*. It was replaced at the Greater Mystery by the fungus able to accommodate thousands of initiates and one linked with the evolution of cultivation and its accord with the darker realms of death and the former offering of human victims.

The logistics of providing Amanitas or Psilocybe mushrooms in great enough quantities for the initiation of thousands should have excluded that hypothesis out of hand, especially in view of the fact that mushrooms in Greece do not fruit in late September; and it would have required cart-loads of the mushrooms, an improbable and hardly disguisable event, in view of keeping the nature of the *kykeon* a secret. A wild mushroom, however, enclosed within the sheaf could not be a better symbol for the secret of the ergotized grain that mediates the divide between the wild and cultivated plants.

Ergine

WEBSTER CONTINUES: *By the process of partial hydrolysis, the entire toxic content of the ergopeptines could be converted to ergine. But unfortunately the psychoactive nature of ergine was originally dismissed by Hofmann and has proved questionable in some–but not all–tests of the Aztec morning glories. Self-tests using the seeds of the Ipomoea vine and with chemically synthesized ergine as a pure compound have yielded mixed results, so that some researchers have suggested that there must be some other, as yet not isolated, compound involved. Even the seldom-faulted Merck Index lists chanoclavine as a possible active principle of* ololiuhqui, *a lysergic acid related alkaloid present in minor quantities in some samples* of ololiuhqui *and ergot as well, although no reports of its psychoactive nature have ever been reported. And indeed, if we believe the testimony of those who have told us how the Central American shamans prepare* ololiuhqui, *namely by cold water extraction of finely powdered seeds, then chanoclavine must be ruled out as it is almost totally insoluble in water. Chanoclavine is not even an amide. Nor has anyone shown any other chemical species in* ololiuhqui *to be suitably psychoactive.*

ololiuhqui was far more prominent as an entheogen here in Mesoamerica than those mushrooms; the mushrooms are mentioned only here and there by a few competent chroniclers; yet almost an

entire book was devoted to denouncing mainly the ololiuhqui idolatry. The annals of the Inquisition contain many times more autos de fe for ololiuhqui than for mushrooms.

JONATHAN OTT

The principle alkaloids of ergot are the toxic ergopeptines, such as ergotamine, and that is where we should concentrate our attention, rather than the minor candidates like the illusory chanoclavine in ololiuhqui *or the ergonovine in ergot, which are minor and quite variable constituents. It is unlikely that a reliable* kykeon *could have been prepared from such a fleeting ergot component for so long without a failure.*

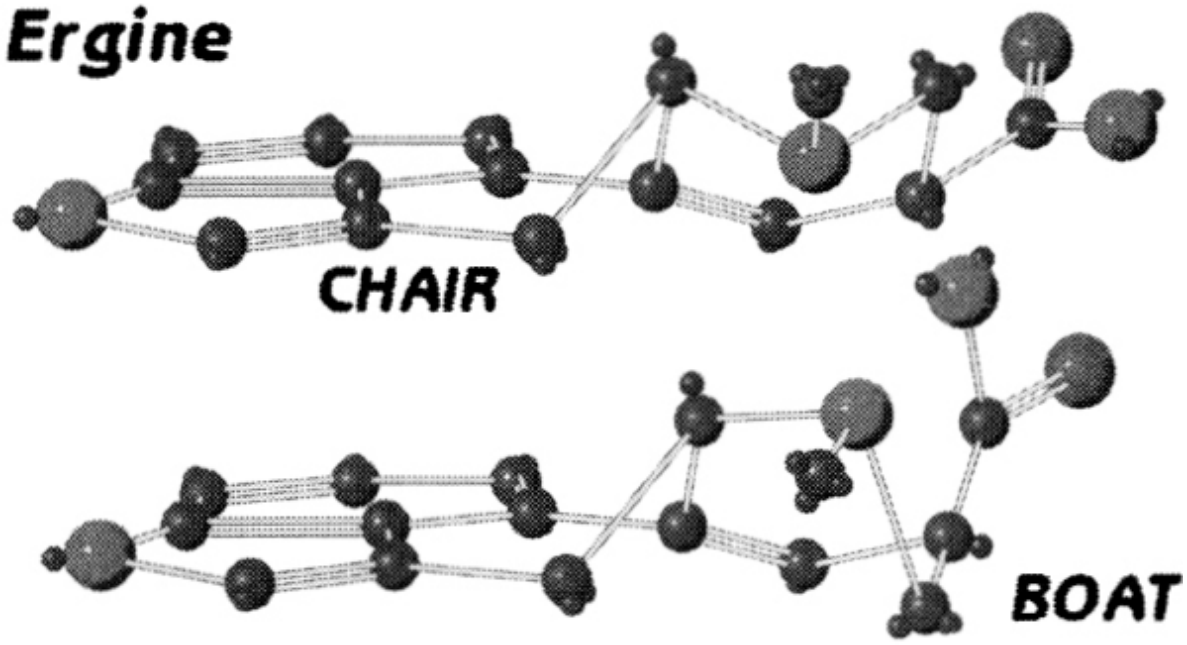
Ergine and Isoergine

THERE IS, however, a rather unusual characteristic of ergine, the simplest of the lysergic acid amides and the substance that we now claim was the essential psychoactive component of the kykeon; *as a natural product, as opposed to the synthesized chemical, it always occurs with its mirror image or epimer, and it is unstable, oscillating between its dichotomous orientations. The combination of the oscillating ergine and its mirrored isoergine appears to be more psychoactive than either in isolation. This is why Hofmann's experiments with the synthesized chemical were unsatisfactory.*

Chair and Boat Conformation

TO UNDERSTAND THE OSCILLATION between ergine and its epimer, we must attempt to visualize the molecules in their true three-dimensional state. The molecule is composed basically of rings of carbon atoms, to which are attached at various points atoms of nitrogen, hydrogen, and oxygen. The topmost carbon ring is designated the D-ring. Although the rest of the molecule is basically flat, with all the carbon atoms in one plane, the nitrogen of the D-ring is attached behind the plane of the molecule, not only

giving the D-ring a decidedly zigzag shape, but ergine exhibits what might at first seem a bizarre behavior; the D-ring is constantly flipping back and forth to an alternate shape or as chemists call it, a conformation.

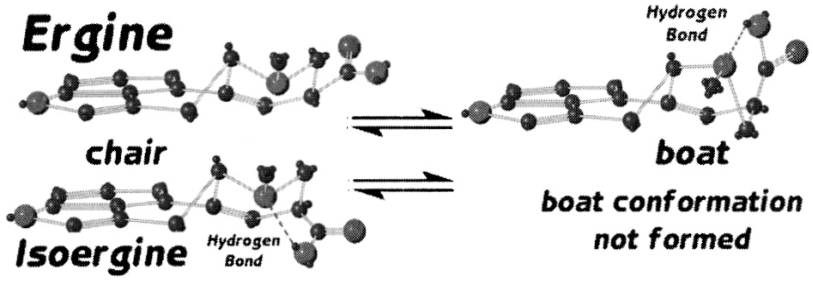


The two shapes are designated the chair and boat conformations, because of their resemblance to those objects. The term “conformation” indicates that the forms differ only in their shape, not in the absolute positions of the atoms of the molecule.

There is also another change in shape that ergine and all lysergic acid alkaloids undergo: two constituents of the molecule actually trade places. This is the process already mentioned of epimerization. The hydrogen atom and the amide side-chain of the D-ring exchange their places of attachment. The reaction is reversible, and after a period of time reaches a state of equilibrium, with both ergine and isoergine present in a particular medium. The epimerization is typified in the case of each specific lysergic acid amide by an equilibrium concentration of the two epimers, and a time required to arrive at this state of equilibrium. These factors are determined by the chemical and physical environment in which the molecule finds itself.

One might expect that isoergine, like ergine would also flip its D-ring back and forth between the chair and boat conformations, but isoergine does

not change its conformation, since it is prevented from doing so by the formation of a hydrogen bond, which locks it into the chair form.



Webster Says: Here's *how that happens. Nitrogen has rather more electrons than it uses in its normal three bonds, and these electrons cause one side of the atom to have a decidedly negative charge. In this case, when a hydrogen attached to another nitrogen is close enough to this negative charge, a hydrogen bond is formed.*

A question kept popping up in my mind, however. Why shouldn't ergine be reliably psychoactive? It is a close relative of LSD and its cousin, the dimethylamide, both of which are undeniably and strongly psychedelic.

PETER WEBSTER.

In the case of ergine in the chair conformation, the corresponding hydrogen is too far away from the lone electron pair, and shielded from it by the poisiton-7 carbon atom. A hydrogen bond in ergine, CAN however form when it is in the boat conformation.

But since in general the boat form of lysergic acid compounds is less energetically favorable, the hydrogen bond in ergine does not prevent it from changing its conformation back to the chair. All these results were confirmed in a paper in the journal Tetrahedron by Bernardi and Barbieri, using infrared spectra of the compounds.

So, we have the possibility that ergine can be in one of three states: it can be ergine *in the chair or boat conformations, or it can be isoergine in the chair conformation. And in many chemical and physical situations, the three forms are constantly converting themselves from one to the others, and achieving a typical equilibrium distribution. We therefore must consider that in an ergot preparation made according to our suggested method, and in morning glory seeds as prepared by Mesoamerican shamans, we are not dealing with pure chemically synthesized* ergine or *pure isoergine. Both pure compounds have been tested and found wanting by some investigators, including Dr. Hofmann.*

The equilibrium mixture of ergine and isoergine may actually be the true psychoactive substance of the kykeon, and of ololiuhqui as well. Since ergine spontaneously changes to isoergine when in solution, over a period of perhaps several hours, any process to partially hydrolyze the alkaloids of ergot such as our proposed recipe–or even the Aztec shamans' procedure for extracting ololiuhqui–should result in a mixture of the three states represented here. Ingesting either ergine or isoergine as a pure compound, however, may not result in the equilibrium mixture arriving at brain receptors. The equilibrium reaction takes some time to occur, perhaps an hour or more, and is brought about most reliably and quickly by basic conditions, and neither in the stomach nor in the blood do we find basic conditions.

In the late 1960s, when I started my research on these matters, I had gone to Mexico to *experiment with morning glory seeds, and to begin with, I extracted several kilos of seed using a simple process, purifying an alcoholic extract between organic solvents in the presence of ammonia and aqueous solutions of tartaric acid. After a couple of days' work, I obtained a nearly colorless syrup that exhibited the bright-blue fluorescence of active lysergic acid compounds. A few milligrams of this syrup, taken in a capsule, produced one of the most powerful psychedelic experiences I had known, and by then I had already taken high-dose LSD several times.*

Ever since, it has therefore been a mystery to me why ergine *should be such a fickle psychedelic, failing with some trials yet succeeding in others. My explanation is that my extraction procedure allowed the*

equilibration of the original extracted ergine to the three ergine variants, and it was this mixture that was so effective. We do know, of course, that sometimes a mixture of two or more drugs can be more effective than any single drug alone.

Bioassay

ERGOTAMINE, as mentioned, is available as a prescription medication for the treatment of migraines. Webster experimented with a preparation sold under the trade name of *Gynergen,* which consists of 1 mg of ergotamine tartrate, mixed with caffeine. The recommended dosage is up to 5 tablets per diem, which produces no psychoactive effect, and is too low to cause ergotism.

Webster explains: I *performed three trials, using first one ergotamine tablet, then two and three tablets. Since ergotamine tartrate, the actual compound in these tablets, is a much larger and therefore heavier molecule than* ergine*, a simple calculation shows that converting 1 mg of ergotamine will ideally yield only a maximum of 4/10^{ths} of a mg or 400 micrograms of ergine and isoergine in their equilibrium mixture.*

> There is little reason to believe that if the partial hydrolysis process occurs with the ergotamine in a Gynergen tablet that it would not occur with the ergotamine and other ergopeptines in ergot.
>
> PETER WEBSTER

In the first trial I heated 1 tablet, containing 1 mg of ergotamine, with 200 mg of hardwood ash in 20 ml of vodka in a kitchen double-boiler, and I found that after one hour the alcohol had boiled off. I continued to heat this mixture for an additional two hours at around 50°C, then neutralized the mixture with vitamin C, or ascorbic acid. Decanting the liquid from the residue of solids left by the wood ash, I

then drank the result. A definite but weak psychoactive effect was noticed.

Repeating the experiment with two and then three migraine tablets, the result was stronger and left no doubt in my mind that the partial hydrolysis process we hypothesize does indeed happen to ergotamine. Whether the reaction goes to completion to convert ***all*** *the ergotamine to ergine and isoergine will require more exacting testing in a proper analytical laboratory, as will the determination of ideal conditions for the reaction. It is possible that under the conditions I used, less-than complete conversion took place, or that side-reactions took place that might have produced other, possibly toxic compounds. I did notice some gastric disturbances serious enough to warrant caution by anyone who would wish to repeat the experiment before more complete laboratory testing can evaluate the procedure.*

In my experiments here I used vodka as a solvent, since in a Gynergen *tablet the ergotamine content exists as tiny crystals and an alcohol-water mixture would enhance the low solubility of these ergotamine crystals. In treating powdered ergot, however, the fatty acid content of ergot would sufficiently solubilize the ergotamine content so that the ancient Greek priests need not have used distilled alcohol, which of course they did not have available. In addition, the ergotamine in an ergot sclerotium probably exists in an amorphous, and not a crystalline state, and it is largely the stability of its crystalline state that requires dissolving in alcohol for hydrolysis. My experiments also used ascorbic acid to neutralize the wood ash, but the Greeks might have employed something else.*

Neutralizing would make the brew more palatable and, in addition, augment the solubility of ergine / isoergine in body fluids since these alkaloids easily form salts with acids such as ascorbic, tartaric, or even hydrochloric acids. These salts are far more soluble than the free base alkaloids.

To fully confirm our hypothesis, assayed ergot shoud be used and chromatographic analysis used to determine the ideal conditions necessary for a complete partial hydrolysis to ergine, and for the equilibrium with isoergine to be established. In my final test, I used

three ergotamine tablets. The results of this trial merit some further thoughts on the kykeon *hypothesis.*

The alkaloid constituents of ergot vary widely according to strain, host, and yearly climatic conditions. The climate in Greece has changed since antiquity, when the more moist conditions would have been very favorable for the growth of the fungus before the early to midsummer harvesting, after the barley itself has dried and the ergots start to fall off spontaneously; and the *Claviceps purpurea* that grows on barley, which was the sacred crop, produces a higher percentage of ergotamine.

Synergy

PERRINE PLAYFULLY COINED THE TERM "synergine" to contrast the effect of a drug in a profane setting and of something more appropriately termed an entheogen in a sacred context. Drugs often produce unsatisfactory or meaningless experiences, whereas somethng as simple as a piece of toast and a cup of black sugerless coffee in a religious setting might open the door to the divine.

Webster concludes that his bioassay with three tablets of ergotamine was not as intense as his test with *ololiuhqui*, although the dose of his morning glory extract had been much stronger, as much as 10 mg and, of course, with a minor amount of other possible natural psychoactive agents. The ergotamine tablets ideally may have produced 1.2 mg of ergineisoergine in equilibrium. The effect came on quickly, after 15-20 minutes, but was not the same as LSD or peyote. It was more hypnotic and inward than the typical psychedelic experience, also less dramatic and more gentle, leading one to recline with eyes closed, whereupon mental processes seem kaleidoscopic and influenced by set and setting. Opening one's eyes to a bright daylight scene tended to minimize the effects, so that it might be more suitable for something like the darkened surroundings of the Eleusinian Telesterion, which would accentuate the effects.

> Breaking of the fast on a Jesuit retreat: It was dawn. For the first time in four days, I ate. In some indescribable way and for what seemed like only a few seconds, I was suspended from the world of space and time and experienced myself in the immediate presence of ‘God.’ I say ‘God’ because It was nothing at all like anything my imagination had ever before constructed.
>
> DANIEL PERRINE ORDAINED PRIEST

Webster theorized, however, that perhaps this type of drug might be more suitable for a large gathering of initiates, where many of the participants would have been without prior visionary experience: The ergine-isoergine experience would seem to allow a maximum of set and setting. Personal idiosyncrasies that often come to the fore with LSD or the other strong psychedelic agents, might be less observed in the ergine-isoergine experience. Full-blown psychedelic experiences such as produced by LSD or psilocybin are perhaps not as suitable for such large groups of persons. Experience shows that with even a small group of novices, at least one or two individuals are always quite likely to freak out and disrupt the setting for everyone else.

> The ideas which the authors brought forth have been largely unchallenged and ignored by specialists in the culture of ancient and classical Greece. The situation seems to fulfill the rule of thumb that when ideas are controversial they are discussed, when they are revolutionary, they are ignored.
>
> TERENCE MCKENNA

This was well demonstrated during the famous Good Friday Marsh Chapel experiment of 1962 at Boston University, in which ten Christian theological students were given psilocybin in a religious setting. One of them reacted so strongly that he had to be sedated so that the rest of the experiment could proceed, and the other participants not be distracted from their own experiences.

At Eleusis, the setting provided by the chanting of the priests and the dancing of priestesses, and all the other pageantry, would have predominated over personal set. The participants had prepared for over a year, had fasted since the previous day, the fifth day in the nine-day ritual, and had exhausted themselves by the long walk along the Sacred Way, lined with impressive sepulchral monuments: past the sacred fig tree by the Kephisos River, given by Demeter to the "planter" Phytalos to reward his hospitality; the event was commemorated by a temple of the two goddesses and the tomb of the dead hero; then up the steep incline through the mountain pass at Daphn; then down past the sanctuary of Aphrodite to the narrow bridge spanning the brackish waters of the Rheitoi Lake, which was the border into the Rarian plain, where they were awarded the saffron ribbons; followed by the ritual abuse as they crossed the bridge over the final stream before the village of Eleusis, probably around nightfall; where they danced into the night beside the Well, before finally entering the forbidden sanctuary though the imposing double portals; parading by the fearful Cave of Pluto and up the incline past the Laugh-less Rock, where the Goddess herself had sat in her grief. Expectation could not be more intense, and every detail of the coming experience had been indoctrinated by myth and reinforced by rituals. It was for this reason that the only requirement for an initiate, apart from being free of bloodguilt, was fluency in the Greek language.

Nevertheless, the psychoactive substance was strong enough to warrant its illegal profane use, and the risk of the extreme penalties that disclosure incurred. Presumably, such recreational use would have been pleasurable, beyond an ordinary alcoholic intoxication fortified with herbs, but devoid of sacred meaning. These herbal additives included the full pharmacopoeia, including opium, thorn apple, henbane, and mandrake, as well as cannabis. Although the name of the latter as cannabis was new after Herodotus first described the Scythians' so-called funeral steam baths, the plant was known

under other names as early as Homer. And its use was associated with the warrior cults of the Spartans, the enemy of the Athenians in the latter part of the 5th century, and with exactly the same aristocratic families whose youths were suspected of falling under the influence of Socrates. The philosopher was parodied in Aristophanes' *Clouds* in a demonstration of his pro-Spartan elitism, high above clouds of smoke. It is more probable that Webster's formula with ergotamine produces something akin to the highly prized *ololiuhqui* of the Maya-Aztecs.

Hypocrisy

THE PROFANERS LEARNED the formula but were silenced. It was a well-kept secret, but the full Eleusinian experience required the entire indoctrination. The journey to Persephone's realm died when the Christians desecrated the sanctuary in the 4th century, but the power of the Goddess lives on in the chapel of the Virgin built on the hillside above the site, where she bears the name of Mesosporitissa, the Lady whose identity is "Within the Kernel of Grain"; and the women of the village still bring her loaves of bread baked from the first fruits of the harvest.

It is unlikely that the formula was ever completely forgotten. It probably was encountered by the Crusaders, at least as some kind of fungal sacrament, in which form it had already become well ensconced in the West as Mithraism, which was the cohesive initiation that bound together the army and bureaucratic elite that administered the Roman Empire; Nero was the first to be inducted by a "magical dinner" (*cenae magicae*). And it came again to the West with the priests and scholars who fled the fall of Byzantium. It was a matter of intense speculation by the Renaissance physicians and philosophers, and it persisted in the antique chemical lore of witches and alchemists. The ecclesiastical elite of the Roman Church jealously guarded the fungal sacrament for their exclusive use and persecuted heretical sects in Europe and in the New World who had versions of the same rites. But the mushroom above the portal of the Basilica in Ávila, the passion of the Manichaeans for mushrooms, especially those of the red variety, and more to the point, certain artistic masterpieces of Renaissance art, betray the hypocrisy.

Of the latter type, we cite the great altarpiece of the painter who went by the name of Grünewald, commissioned by the influential Antonite monks who cared at Isenheim for those afflicted with Saint Anthony's Fire, where the *Amanita muscaria* is revealed in the most innermost panel of the triptych as the secret sacrament; and Titian's *Bacchanal of the Andrians,* commissioned by the Duke Alfonso II of Ferrara, husband of Lucretia Borgia, the pope's illegitimate daughter, to decorate his private chamber, right off his bedroom, on the theme of ancient orgies, where the sanctity of recycled intoxicating urine is revealed as the alchemical potion. In the East, remembrances, at least, but more probably actual knowledge, associated the sheaf of grain in mystical Islam with the forbidden fruit of Adam. The fungal potion and the red and golden "apple" were perpetuated as complementary versions of the same sacrament.

> Alas! The forbidden fruits were eaten,
> And thereby the warm life of reason congealed.
> A grain of wheat eclipsed the sun of Adam,
> Like as the Dragon's tail dulls the brightness of the moon.
>
> RUMI: MASNAVI I MA'NAVI

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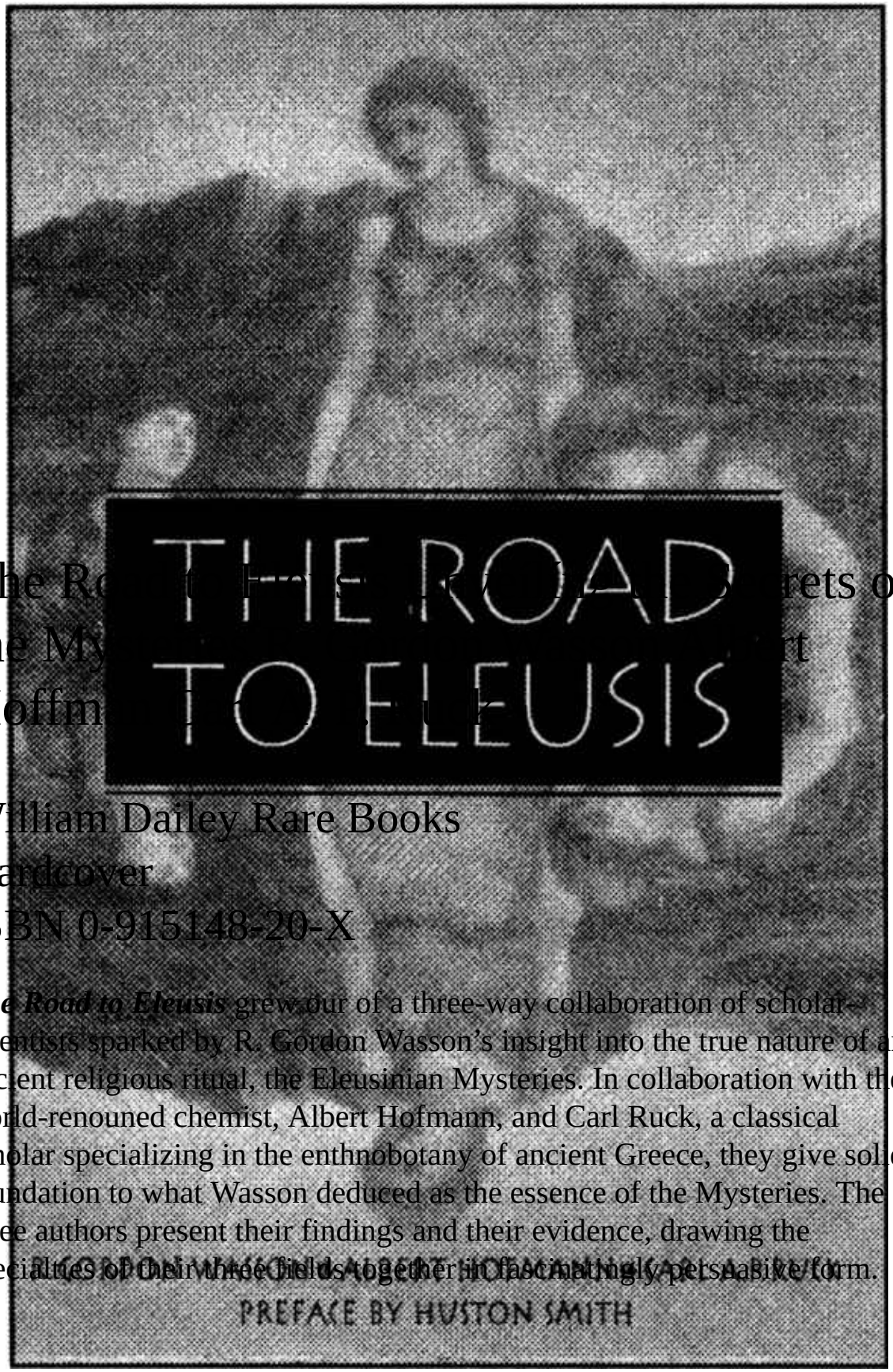

The Road to Eleusis: Unveiling the Secrets of the Mysteries

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